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THE DAY WILL COME.

CHAPTER I.

"Farewell, too—now at last—
Farewell, fair lily."

The joy-bells clashed out upon the clear, bright air, startling the rooks in the elm-trees that showed their leafy tops above the grey gables of the old church. The bells broke out with sudden jubilation; sudden, albeit the village had been on the alert for that very sound all the summer afternoon, uncertain as to when the signal for that joy peal might be given.

The signal had come now, given by the telegraph wires to the old postmistress, and sent on to the expectant ringers in the church tower. The young couple had arrived at Wareham station, five miles off; and four horses were bringing them to their honeymoon home yonder amidst the old woods of Cheriton Chase.

Cheriton village had been on tiptoe with expectancy ever since four o'clock, although common sense ought to have informed the villagers that a bride and bridegroom who were to be married at two o'clock in Westminster Abbey were not very likely to appear at Cheriton early in the afternoon. But the village having made up its mind to a half-holiday was glad to begin early. A little knot of gipsies from the last race-meeting in the neighbourhood had improved the occasion and set up the friendly and familiar image of Aunt Sally on the green in front of the Eagle Inn; while a rival establishment had started a pictorial shooting-gallery, with a rubicund giant's face and wide-open mouth, grinning at the populace across a barrel of Barcelona nuts. There are some people who might think Cheriton village and Cheriton Chase too remote from the busy world and its traffic to be subject to strong emotions of any kind. Yet even in this region of Purbeck, cut off from the rest of England by a winding river, and ostentatiously calling itself an island, there were eager interests and warm feelings, and many a link with the great world of men and women on the other side of the stream.

Cheriton Chase was one of the finest places in the county of Dorset. It lay south of Wareham, between Corfe Castle and Branksea Island, and in the midst of scenery which has a peculiar charm of its own, a curious blending of level pasture and steep hillside, barren heath and fertile water-meadow; here a Dutch landscape, grazing cattle, and winding stream; there a suggestion of some lonely Scottish deer-walk; an endless variety of outline; and yonder on the steep hilltop the grim stone walls and mouldering bastions of Corfe Castle, standing dark and stern against the blue fair-weather sky or boldly confronting the force of the tempest.

Cheriton House was almost as old as Corfe in the estimation of some of the country people. Its history went back into the night of ages. But while the Castle had suffered siege and battery by Cromwell's ruthless cannon, and had been left to stand as that arch-destroyer left it, until only the outer walls of the mighty fabric remained, with a tower or two, and the mullions of one great window standing up above the rest, the mere skeleton of the gigantic pile, Cheriton House had been cared for and added to century after century, so that it presented now a picturesque blending of old and new, in which almost every corridor and every room was a surprise to the stranger.

Never had Cheriton been better cared for than by its present owner, nor had Cheriton village owned a more beneficent lord of the manor. And yet Lord Cheriton was an alien and a stranger to the soil, and that kind of person whom rustics mostly are inclined to look down upon—a self-made man.

The present master of Cheriton was a man who owed wealth and distinction to his own talents. He had been raised to the peerage about fifteen years before this day of clashing joy-bells and village rejoicings. He had been owner of the Cheriton estate for more than twenty years, having bought the property on the death of the last squire, and at a time of unusual depression. He was popularly supposed to have got the estate for an old song; but the old song meant something between seventy and eighty thousand pounds, and represented the bulk of his wife's fortune. He had not been afraid so to swamp his wife's dowry, for he was at this time one of the most popular silk gowns at the equity Bar. He was making four or five thousand a year, and he was strong in the belief in his power to rise higher.

The purchase, prompted by ambition, and a desire to take his place among the landed gentry, had turned out a very lucky one from a financial point of view, for a stone quarry that had been unworked for more than a century was speedily developed by the new owner of the soil, and became a source of income which enabled him to improve mansion-house and farms without embarrassment.

Under Mr. Dalbrook's improving hand, the Cheriton estate, which

had been gradually sinking to decay in the occupation of an exhausted race, became as perfect as human ingenuity, combined with judicious outlay, can make any estate. The falcon eye of the master was on all things. The famous advocate's only idea of a holiday was to work his hardest in the supervision of his Dorsetshire property. He thought of Cheriton many a time in the law courts, as Fox used to think of St. Anne's and his turnips amidst the debauchery of a long night's card-playing, or in the whirl of a stormy debate. Purbeck might have been the motto and password of his life. He was born at Dorchester, the son of humble shopkeeping parents, and was educated at the quaint old stone grammar school in that good old town. All his happiest hours of boyhood had been spent in the Isle of Purbeck. Those watery meadows and breezy commons and break-neck hills had been his playground; and when he went back to them as a hard-headed, overworked man of the world, made arrogant from the magnitude of a success which had never known check or retrogression, the fountains of his heart were unlocked by the very atmosphere of that fertile land where the salt breath of the sea came tempered by the balmy perfume of the heather, the odour of hedgerow flowers, rosemary, and thyme.

At Cheriton James Dalbrook unbent, forgot that he was a great man, and remembered only that his lot was cast in a pleasant place, and that he had the most lovable of wives and the loveliest of daughters.

His daughter had been born at Cheriton, had known no other country home, and had never considered the first-floor flat in Victoria Street where her father and mother spent the London season, and where her father had his *pied-à-terre* all the year round, in the light of a home. His daughter, Juanita, was the eldest of three children born in the old manor house. The two younger, both sons, died in infancy; and it seemed to James Dalbrook that there was a blight upon his offspring, such a blight as that which withered the male children of Henry of England and Catherine of Arragon. Much had been given to him. He had been allowed to make name and fortune, he whose sole heritage was a little crockery shop in a second-rate street of Dorchester. He had enjoyed the lordship of broad acres, the honours and position of a rural squire; but he was not to be allowed that crowning glory for which strong men yearn. He was not to be the first of a long line of Barons Cheriton of Cheriton.

After the grief and disappointment of those two deaths—first of an infant of a few weeks old, and afterwards of a lovely child of two years—James Dalbrook hardened his heart for a little while against the fair young sister who survived them. She could not perpetuate that barony which was the crown of his greatness; or if by special grace her father's title might be in after-days bestowed upon the husband of her choice—which in the event of her marrying judi-

ciously and marrying wealth, might not be impracticable—it would be an alien to his race who would bear the title which he, James Dalbrook, had created. He had so longed for a son, and behold two had been given to him, and upon both the blight had fallen. When people praised his daughter's childish loveliness he shook his head despondently, thinking that she too would be taken, like her brothers, before ever the bud became a flower.

His heart sickened at thought of this contingency, and of his heir-at-law in the event of his dying childless, a first cousin, clerk in an auctioneer's office at Weymouth, a sandy-haired freckled youth, without an aspirate, with a fixed idea that he was an authority upon dress, style, and billiards, an insupportable young man under any conditions, but hateful to murderousness as one's next heir. To think of that freckled snob strutting about the estate in years to come, blinking with his white eyelashes at those things which had been so dear to the dead!

His wife, to whom he owed the estate, had no relations nearer or dearer to her than the freckled auctioneer was to her husband. There remained for them both to work out their plans for the disposal of that estate and fortune which was their own to deal with as they pleased. Already James Dalbrook had dim notions of a Dalbrook Scholarship Fund, in which future barristers should have their long years of waiting upon fortune made easier to them, and for which they should bless the memory of the famous advocate.

Happily those brooding fears were not realized; this time the bud was not blighted, the flower carried no canker in its heart, but opened its petals to the morning of life, a strong bright blossom, revelling in sun and shower, wind and spray. Juanita grew from babyhood to girlhood with hardly an illness, save the regulation childish complaints, which touched her as lightly as a butterfly's wing touches the flowers.

Her mother was of Spanish extraction, the granddaughter of a Cadiz merchant, who had failed in the wine trade and had left his sons and daughters to carve their own way to fortune. Her father had gone to San Francisco at the beginning of the gold fever, had been one of the first to understand the safest way to take advantage of the situation, and had started a wine-shop and hotel, out of which he made a splendid fortune within fifteen years. He acquired wealth in good time to send his two daughters to Paris for their education, and by the time they were grown up he was rich enough to retire from business, and was able to dispose of his hotel and wine-store for a sum which made a considerable addition to his capital. He established himself in a brand-new first-floor in one of the avenues of the Bois de Boulogne, a rich widower, more of an American than a Spaniard after his long exile, and he launched his two handsome daughters in Franco-American society. From Paris they went to London, and were well received in that upper middle-

class circle in which wealth can generally command a welcome, and in which a famous barrister, like Mr. Dalbrook, ranks as a star of the first magnitude. James Dalbrook was then at the apogee of his success, a large handsome man on the right side of his fortieth birthday. He was not by any means the kind of man who would seem a likely suitor for a beautiful girl of three and twenty; but it happened that his heavily handsome face and commanding manner, his deep, strong voice and brilliant conversation possessed just the charm that could subjugate Maria Morales' fancy. His conquest came upon him as a bewildering surprise, and nothing could be further from his thoughts than a marriage with the Spaniard's daughter; and yet within six weeks of their first meeting at a Royal Academy soirée in the shabby old rooms in Trafalgar Square, Mr. Dalbrook and Miss Morales were engaged, with the full consent of her father, who declared himself willing to give his daughter forty thousand pounds, strictly settled upon herself, for her dowry, but who readily doubled that sum when his future son-in-law revealed his desire to become owner of Cheriton, and to found a family. For such a laudable purpose Mr. Morales was willing to make sacrifices; more especially as Maria's elder sister had offended him by marrying without his consent, an offence which was only cancelled by her untimely death soon after her marriage.

Juanita was only three years old when her father was raised to the bench, and she was not more than six when he was offered a peerage, which he accepted promptly, very glad to exchange the name of Dalbrook—still extant over the old shop-window in Dorchester, though the old shopkeepers were at rest in the cemetery outside the town—for the title of Baron Cheriton.

As Lord Cheriton James Dalbrook linked himself indissolubly with the lands which his wife's money had bought—money made in a 'Frisco wine-shop for the most part. Happily, however, few of Lord Cheriton's friends were aware of that fact. Morales had traded under an assumed name in the miners' city, and had only resumed his patronymic on retiring from the bar and the wine-vaults.

It will be seen, therefore, that Juanita could not boast of aristocratic lineage upon either side. Her beauty and grace, her lofty carriage and high-bred air, were spontaneous as the beauty of a wild flower upon one of those furzy knolls over which her young feet had bounded in many a girlish race with her dogs or her chosen companion of the hour. She looked like the daughter of a duke, although one of her grandfathers had sold pots and pans, and the other had kept order, with a bowie-knife and a revolver in his belt, over the humours of a 'Frisco tavern, in the days when the city was still in its rough and tumble infancy, fierce as a bull-pup. Her father, who, as the years went on, worshipped this only child of his, never forgot that she lacked that one sovereign advantage of good birth and highly placed kindred; and thus it was that from her

childhood he had been on the watch for some alliance which should give her these advantages.

The opportunity had soon offered itself. Among his Dorsetshire neighbours one of the most distinguished was Sir Godfrey Carmichael, a man of old family and good estate, highly connected on the maternal side, and well connected all round, and married to the daughter of an Irish peer. Sir Godfrey showed himself friendly from the hour of Mr. Dalbrook's advent in the neighbourhood. He declared himself delighted to welcome new blood when it came in the person of a man of talent and power. Lady Jane Carmichael was equally pleased with James Dalbrook's gentle wife. The friendship thus begun never knew any interruption till it ended suddenly in a ploughed field between Wareham and Wimbourne, where Sir Godfrey's horse blundered at a fence, fell, and rolled over his rider, ten years after Juanita's birth.

There were two daughters and a son, considerably their junior, who succeeded his father at the age of fifteen, and who had been Juanita's playfellow ever since she could run alone.

The two fathers had talked together of the possibilities of the future while their children were playing tennis on the lawn at Cheriton, or gathering blackberries on the common. Sir Godfrey was enough a man of the world to rejoice in the idea of his son's marriage with the heiress of Cheriton, albeit he knew that the little dark-eyed girl, with the tall slim figure and graceful movements, had no place among the salt of the earth. His own estate was a poor thing compared with Cheriton and the Cheriton stone-quarries; and he knew that Dalbrook's professional earnings had accumulated into a very respectable fortune invested in stocks and shares of the soundest quality. Altogether his son could hardly do better than continue to attach himself to that dark-eyed child as he was attaching himself now in his first year at Eton, riding his pony over to Cheriton every non-hunting day, and ministering to her childish caprices in all things.

The two mothers had talked of the future with more detail and more assurance than the fathers, as men of the world, had ventured upon. Lady Cheriton was in love with her little girl's boyish admirer. His frank, handsome face, open-hearted manner, and undeniable pluck realized her ideal of high-bred youth. His mother was the daughter of an earl, his grandmother was the niece of a duke. He had the right to call an existing duke his cousin. These things counted for much in the mind of the storekeeper's daughter. Her experience at a fashionable Parisian convent had taught her to worship rank; her experience of English middle-class society had not eradicated that weakness. And then she saw that this fine, frank lad was devoted to her daughter with all a boy's ardent feeling for his first sweetheart.

The years went on, and young Godfrey Carmichael and Juanita

Dalbrook were sweethearts still—sweethearts always—sweethearts when he was at Eton, sweethearts when he was at Oxford, sweethearts in union, and sweethearts in absence, neither of them ever imagining any other love; and now, in the westering sunlight of this July evening, the bells of Cheriton Church were ringing a joy-peal to celebrate their wedded loves, and the little street was gay with floral archways and bright-coloured bunting, and mottoes of welcome and greeting, and Lady Cheriton's barouche was bringing the bride and bridegroom to their first honeymoon dinner, as fast as four horses could trot along the level road from quiet little Wareham.

By a curious fancy Juanita had elected to spend her honeymoon in that one house of which she ought to have been most weary, the good old house in which she had been born, and where all her days of courtship, a ten years' courtship, had been spent. In vain had the fairest scenes of Europe been suggested to her. She had travelled enough to be indifferent to mountains and lakes, glaciers and fjords.

"I have seen just enough to know that there is no place like home," she said, with her pretty air of authority. "I won't have a honeymoon at all if I can't have it at Cheriton. I want to feel what it is like to have you all to myself in my own place, Godfrey, among all the things I love. I shall feel like a queen with a slave; I shall feel like Delilah with Samson. When you are quite tired of Cheriton —and subjection, you shall take me to the Priory; and once there you shall be master and I will be slave."

"Sweet mastership, tyrannous slavery," he answered, laughing. "My darling, Cheriton will suit me better than any other place in the world for my honeymoon, for I shall be near my future electors, and shall be able to study the political situation in all its bearings upon—the Isle of Purbeck."

Sir Godfrey was to stand for his division of the county in the election that was looming in the distance of the late autumn. He was very confident of success, as a young man might be who came of a time-honoured race, and knew himself popular in the district, armed with all the newest ideas, too, full to the brim of the most modern intelligence, a brilliant debater at Oxford, a favourite everywhere. His marriage would increase his popularity and strengthen his position, with the latent power of that larger wealth which must needs be his in the future.

The sun was shining in golden glory upon grey stone roofs and grey stone walls, clothed with rose and honeysuckle, clematis and trumpet ash,—upon the village forge, where there had been no work done since the morning, where the fire was out, and the men were lounging at door and window in their Sunday clothes,—upon the three or four village shops, and the two village inns, the humble little house of call opposite the forge, with its queer old sign, "Live

and Let Live," and the good old "George Hotel," with sprawling, dilapidated stables and spacious yard, where the mail-coach used to stop in the days that were gone.

There was a floral arch between the little tavern and the forge—a floral display along the low rustic front of the butcher's shop—and the cottage post-office was converted into a bower. There were calico mottoes flapping across the road—"Welcome to the Bride and Bridegroom," "God Bless Them Both," "Long Life and Happiness," and other fond and hearty phrases of time-honoured familiarity. But those clashing bells, with their sound of tumultuous gladness, a joy that clamoured to the blue skies above and the woods below, and out to the very sea yonder, in its loud exuberance, those and the smiling faces of the villagers were the best of all welcomes.

There were gentlefolks among the crowd—a string of pony carts and carriages drawn up on the long slip of waste grass beyond the forge, just where the road turned off to Cheriton Chase; and there were two or three horsemen, one a young man upon a fine bay cob, who had been walking his horse about restlessly for the last hour or so, sometimes riding half a mile towards the station in his impatience.

The carriage came towards the turning-point, the bride bowing and smiling as she returned the greetings of gentle and simple. Emotion had paled the delicate olive of her complexion, but her large dark eyes were bright with gladness. Her straw-coloured tussore gown and leghorn hat were the perfection of simplicity, and seemed to surround her with an atmosphere of coolness amidst the dust and glare of the road.

At sight of the young man on the bay cob, she put her hand on Sir Godfrey's arm and said something to him, on which he told the coachman to stop. They had driven slowly through the village, and the horses pulled up readily at the turn of the road.

"Only to think of your coming so far to greet us, Theodore!" said Juanita, leaning out of the carriage to shake hands with the owner of the cob.

"I wanted to be among the first to welcome you, that was all," he answered quietly. "I had half a mind to ride to the station and be ready to hand you into your carriage, but I thought Sir Godfrey might think me a nuisance."

"No fear of that, my dear Dalbrook," said the bridegroom. "I should have been very glad to see you. Did you ride all the way from Dorchester?"

"Yes; I came over early in the morning, breakfasted with a friend, rested the cob all day, and now he is ready to carry me home again."

"What devotion!" said Juanita, laughingly, yet with a shade of embarrassment.

"What good exercise for Peter, you mean. Keeps him in condition against the cubbing begins. God bless you, Juanita. I can't

do better than echo the invocation above our heads, 'God bless the bride and bridegroom.'"

He shook hands with them both for the second time. A faint glow of crimson swept over his frank fair face as he clasped those hands. His honest grey eyes looked at his cousin for a moment with grave tenderness, in which there was the shadow of a life-long regret. He had loved and wooed her, and resigned her to her more favoured lover, and he was honest in his desire for her happiness. His own gladness, his own life, seemed to him of small account when weighed against her well-being.

"You must come and dine with us before we leave Cheriton, Dalbrook," said Sir Godfrey.

"You are very good. I am off to Heidelberg for a holiday as soon as I can wind up my office work. I will offer myself to you later on, if I may, when you are settled at the Priory."

"Come when you like. Good-bye."

The carriage turned the corner. The crowd burst into a cheer: one, two, three, and then another one: and then three more cheers louder than the first three, and the horses were on the verge of bolting for the rest of the way to Cheriton.

Theodore Dalbrook rode slowly away from the village festivities, rode away from the clang of the joy-bells, and the sound of rustic triple bob majors. It would be night before he reached Dorchester; but there was a moon, and he knew every yard of high road, every grassy ride across the wide barren heath between Cheriton and the old Roman city. He knew the road and he knew his horse, which was as good of its kind as there was to be found in the county of Dorset. He was not a rich man, and he had to work hard for his living, but he was the son of a well-to-do father, and he never stinted the price of the horse that carried him, and which was something more to Theodore Dalbrook than most men's horses are to them. It was his own familiar friend, companion, and solace. A man might have understood as much only to see him lean over the cob's neck, and pat him, as he did to-night, riding slowly up the hill that leads from Cheriton to the wild ridge of heath above Branksea Island.

Theodore Dalbrook, junior partner in the firm of Dalbrook & Son, Cornhill, Dorchester, was a more distant relative of Juanita's than the sandy first-cousin in the auctioneer's office whom Lord Cheriton had once hated as the only alternative to a charitable endowment. The sandy youth was the only son of Lord Cheriton's elder brother, long since dead. Theodore was the grandson of a certain Matthew Dalbrook, a second cousin of Lord Cheriton's, and once upon a time the wealthiest and most important member of the Dalbrook family. The humble-minded couple in the crockery shop had looked up to Matthew Dalbrook, solicitor, with a handsome old house in Cornhill, a smart gig, a stud of three fine horses, and half

the county people for his clients. To the plain folks behind the counter, who dined at one and supped on cold meat and pickles and Dutch cheese at nine of the clock, Mr. Dalbrook, the lawyer, was a great man. They were moved by his condescension when he dropped in to the five-o'clock tea, and talked over old family reminiscences, the farmhouse on the Weymouth Road, which was the cradle of their race, and where they had all known good days while the old people were alive, and while the homestead was a family rendezvous. That he should deign to take tea and water-cresses in the little parlour behind the shop, he who had a drawing-room almost as big as a church, and a man-servant in plain clothes to wait upon him at his six-o'clock dinner, was a touching act of humility in their eyes. When their younger boy brought home prizes and certificates of all kinds from the grammar school, it was from Matthew they sought advice, modestly, and with the apprehension of being deemed over-ambitious.

"I'm afraid he's too much of a scholar for the business," said the mother, shyly, looking fondly at her tall, overgrown son, pallid with rapid growth and overmuch Greek and Latin.

"Of course he is; that boy is too good to sell pots and pans. You must send him to the University, Jim."

Jim, the father, looked despondently at James, the son. The University meant something awful in the crockery merchant's mind: a vast expenditure of money; dreadful hazards to religion and morals; friendships with dukes and marquises, whose influence would alienate the boy from his parents, and render him scornful of the snug back-parlour, with his grandfather's portrait over the mantel-piece, painted in oils by a gifted townsman, who had once had a picture very nearly hung in the Royal Academy.

"I couldn't afford to send him to college," he said.

"Oh, but you must afford it. I must help you, if you and Sarah haven't got enough in an old stocking anywhere—as I dare say you have. My boys are at the University, and they didn't do half as well at the grammar school as your boy has done. He must go to Cambridge, he must be entered at Trinity Hall, and if he works hard and keeps steady he needn't cost you a fortune. You would work, eh, James?"

"Wouldn't I just, that's all," James replied with emphasis.

His heart had sickened at the prospect of the crockery business: the consignments of pots and pans; the returned empties, invoices, quarterly accounts, matchings, rivetings, dust, straw, dirt, and degradation. He could not see the nobility of labour in that dusty shop, below the level of the pavement, amid ewers and basins, teacups and beer jugs, sherries and ports. But to work in the University—hard by that great college where Bacon had worked, and Newton, and a host of the mighty dead, and where Whewell, a self-made man, was still head—to work among the sons of gentlemen, and

with a view to the profession of a gentleman,—*that* would be labour for which to live; for which to die, if need be.

"If—if mother and me were to strain a p'int," mused the crockery man, who was better able to afford the University for his son than many a gentleman of Dorset whose boys had to be sent there, willy nilly, "if mother and me that have worked so hard for our money was willing to spend a goodish bit of it upon sending him to college, what are we to do with him after we've made a fine gentleman of him? *That's* where it is, you see, Mat."

"You are not going to make a fine gentleman of him. God forbid. If he does well at Cambridge, you can make a lawyer of him. Trinity Hall is the nursery of lawyers. You can article him to me; and look you here, Jim, if I don't have to help you pay for his education, I'll give him his articles. There, now, what do you say to that?"

The offer was pronounced a generous one, and worthy of a blood relation; but James Dalbrook never took advantage of his kinsman's kindness. His University career was as successful as his progress at the quaint stone grammar school, and his college friends, who were neither dukes nor marquises, but fairly sensible young men, all advised him to apply himself to the higher branch of the law. So James Dalbrook, of Trinity Hall, ate his dinners at the Temple during his last year of undergraduate life, came out seventh wrangler, was called to the Bar, and in due course wore crimson, velvet, and ermine, and became Lord Cheriton, a man whose greatness in somewise overshadowed the small provincial dignity of the house of Matthew Dalbrook, erstwhile head of the family.

The Dalbrooks, of Dorchester, had gone upon their way quietly, thriving, respected, but in no wise distinguished. Matthew, junior, had succeeded his father, Matthew, senior, and the firm in Cornhill had been Dalbrook & Son for more than thirty years; and now Theodore, the eldest of a family of five, was Son, and his grandfather, the founder of the firm, was sleeping the sleep of the just in the cemetery outside Dorchester.

Lord Cheriton was too wise a man to forget old obligations or to avoid his kindred. There was nothing to be ashamed of in his connection with a thoroughly reputable firm like Dalbrook & Son. They might be provincial, but their name was a synonym for honour and honesty. They had taken as firm root in the land as the county families whose title-deeds and leases, wills and codicils they kept. They were well-bred, well-educated, God-fearing people, with no struggling ambitions, no morbid craving to get upon a higher social level than the status to which their professional position and their means entitled them. They rode and drove good horses, kept good servants, lived in a good house, visited among the county people with moderation, but they made no pretensions to being "smart." They offered no sacrifices of fortune or self-respect to the modern Moloch—Fashion.

There was a younger son called Harrington, destined for the Church, and with advanced views upon church architecture and music; and there were two unmarried daughters, Janet and Sophia, also with advanced views upon the woman's rights question, and with a sovereign contempt for the standard young lady.

Theodore's lines were marked out for him with inevitable precision. He had been taken into partnership the day he was out of his articles, and at seven-and-twenty he was his father's right hand, and represented all that was modern and popular in the firm. He was steady as a rock, had an intellect of singular acuteness, a ready wit, and very pleasing manners. He had, above all things, the inestimable gift of an equable and happy temper. He had been everybody's favourite from the nursery upwards, popular at school, popular at the University, popular in the local club, popular in the hunting field; and it was the prevailing opinion of Dorchester that he ought to marry an heiress and make a great position for the house of Dalbrook. Some people had gone so far as to say that he ought to marry Lord Cheriton's daughter.

He had been made free of the great house at Cheriton from the time he was old enough to visit anywhere. His family had been bidden to all notable festivities; had been duly called upon, at not too long intervals, by Lady Cheriton. He had ridden by Juanita's side in many a run with the South Dorset foxhounds, and had waited about with her outside many a covert. They had pic-nicked and made gipsy tea at Corfe Castle; they had rambled in the woods near Studland; they had sailed to Branksea, and, further away, to Lulworth Cove, and the romantic caves of Stare: but this had been all in frank cousinly friendship. Theodore had seen only too soon that there was no room for him in his kinswoman's heart. He began by admiring her as the loveliest girl he had ever seen; he had ended by adoring her, and he adored her still—but with a loyal regard which accepted her position as another man's wife; and he would have died sooner than dishonour her by one unholy thought.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he rode slowly along the avenue that led into Dorchester. The moon was shining between the overarching boughs of the sycamores. The road with that high overarching roof had a solemn look in the moonlit stillness. The Roman amphitheatre yonder, with its grassy banks rising tier above tier, shone white in the moonbeams; the old town seemed half asleep. The house in Cornhill had a very Philistine look as compared with that fine old mansion of Cheriton which was present in his mind in very vivid colours to-night, those two wandering about the old Italian garden, hand-in-hand, wedded lovers, with the lamplit rooms open to the soft summer night, and the long terrace and stone balustrade and moss-grown statues of nymph and goddess silvered by the moonbeams. The Cornhill house was a good old house notwithstanding, a panelled house of the Georgian era, with a wide entrance-

hall, and a well-staircase with carved oak balusters and a baluster rail a foot broad. The furniture had been very little changed since the days of Theodore's great-grandfather, for the late Mrs. Dalbrook had cherished no yearnings for modern art in the furniture line. Her gentle spirit had looked up to her husband as a leader of men, and had reverenced chairs and tables, bureaus and wardrobes that had belonged to his grandfather, as if they were made sacred by that association. And thus the good old house in the good old town had a savour of bygone generations, an old family air which the parvenu would buy for much gold if he could. True that the dining-room chairs were over-ponderous, and the dining-room pictures belonged to the obscure school of religious art in which you can only catch your saint or your martyr at one particular angle; yet the chairs were of a fine antique form, and bore the crest of the Dalbrooks on their shabby leather backs, and the pictures had a respectable brownness which might mean Holbein or Rembrandt.

The drawing-room was large and bright, with four narrow, deeply recessed windows commanding the broad street and the Antelope Hotel over the way, and deep window seats crammed with flowers. Here the oak panelling had been painted pale pink, and the mouldings picked out in a deeper tint by successive generations of Vandals, but the effect was cheerful, and the pink walls made a good background for the Chippendale secretaires and cabinets filled with willow-pattern Worcester or Crown Derby. The window-curtains were dark brown cloth, with a border of Berlin wool lilies and roses, a border which would have set the teeth of an æsthete on edge, but which blended with the general brightness of the room. Old Mrs. Matthew Dalbrook, the grandmother, and her three spinster daughters had toiled over these cross-stitch borders, and Theodore's mother would have deemed it sacrilege to have put aside this labour of a vanished life.

Harrington Dalbrook and his two sisters were in the drawing-room, each apparently absorbed in an instructive book, and yet all three had been talking for the greater part of the evening. It was a characteristic of their highly intellectual lives to nurse a volume of Herbert Spencer or a treatise upon the deeper mysteries of Buddha, while they discussed the conduct or morals of their neighbours—or their gowns and bonnets.

"I thought you were never coming home, Theo," said Janet. "You don't mean to say you waited to see the bride and bridegroom?"

"That is exactly what I do mean to say. I had to get old Sandown's lease executed, and when I had finished my business I waited about to see them arrive. Do you think you could get me anything in the way of supper, Janie?"

"Father went to bed ever so long ago," replied Janet; "it's dreadfully late."

"But I don't suppose the cook has gone to bed, and perhaps she would condescend to cut me a sandwich or two," answered Theodore, ringing the bell.

His sisters were orderly young women, who objected to eating and drinking out of regulation hours. Janet looked round the room discontentedly, thinking that her brother would make crumbs. Young men, she had observed, are almost miracle workers in the way of crumbs. They can get more superfluous crumbs out of any given piece of bread than the entire piece would appear to contain, looked at by the casual eye.

"I have found a passage in Spencer which most fully bears out *my* view, Theodore," said Sophia, severely, referring to an argument she had had with her brother the day before yesterday.

"How did she look?" asked Janet, openly frivolous for the nonce.

"Lovelier than I ever saw her look in her life," answered Theodore. "At least I thought so."

He wondered, as he said those words, whether it had been his own despair at the thought of having irrevocably lost her which invested her familiar beauty with a new and mystic power. "Yes, she looked exquisitely lovely, and completely happy—an ideal bride."

"If her nose were a thought longer her face would be almost perfect," said Janet. "How was she dressed?"

"I can no more tell you than I could say how many petals there are in that Dijon rose yonder. She gave me an impression of cool soft colour. I think there was yellow in her hat—pale yellow, like a primrose."

"Men are such dolts about women's dress," retorted Janet, impatiently; "and yet they pretend to have taste and judgment, and to criticize everything we wear."

"I think you may rely upon us for knowing what we *don't* like," said Theodore.

He seated himself in his father's easy-chair, a roomy old chair with projecting sides, that almost hid him from the other occupants of the room. He was weary and sad, and their chatter irritated his overstrung nerves. He would have gone straight to his own room on arriving, but that would have set them wondering, and he did not want to be wondered about. He wanted to keep his secret, or as much of it as he could. No doubt those three knew that he had been fond of her, very fond; that he would have sacrificed half his lifetime to win her for the other half; but they did not know how fond. They did not know that he would fain have melted down all the sands of time into one grain of gold—one golden day in which to hold her to his heart and know she loved him

CHAPTER II.

"And warm and light I felt her clasping hand
When twined in mine; she followed where I went."

THERE is a touch of childishness in all honeymoon couples, a something which suggests the Babes in the Wood, left to play together by the Arch-Deceiver, Fate; wandering hand in hand in the morning sunshine, gathering flowers, pleased with the mossy banks and leafy glades, like those children of the old familiar story, before ever hunger or cold or fear came upon them, before the shadow of night and death stole darkly on their path. Even Godfrey Carmichael, a sensible, highly educated young man, whose pride it was to march in the van of progress and enlightenment, even he had that touch of childishness which is adorable in a lover, and which lasts, oh, so short a time; transient as the bloom on the peach, the down on the butterfly's wing, the morning dew on a rose.

He had loved her all his life, as it seemed to him. They had been companions, friends, lovers, for longer than either could remember, so gradual had been the growth of love. Yet the privilege of belonging to each other was not the less sweet because of this old familiarity.

"Are we really married—really husband and wife—Godfrey?" asked Juanita, nestling to his side as they stood together in the wide verandah where they breakfasted on these July mornings among climbing roses and clematis. "Husband and wife—such prosaic words. I heard you speak of me to the Vicar yesterday as 'my wife.' It gave me quite a shock."

"Were you sorry to think it was true?"

"Sorry—no! But 'wife.' The word has such a matter-of-fact sound. It means a person who writes cheques for the house accounts, revises the bill of fare, and takes all the blame when the servants do wrong."

"Shall I call you my idol, then, my goddess—the enchantress whose magic wand wafts gladness and sunshine over my existence?"

"No, call me wife. It is a good word, after all, Godfrey—a good serviceable word, a word that will stand wear and tear. It means for ever."

They breakfasted *tête-à-tête* in their bower of roses; they wandered about the Chase or sat in the garden all day long. They led an idle desultory life like little children, and wondered that evening came so soon, and stayed up late into the summer night, steeping themselves in the starshine and silence which seemed new to them in their mutual delight.

There was a lovely view from that broad terrace, with its Italian balustrade and statues, its triple flight of marble steps descending to an Italian garden, which had been laid out in the Augustan age of Pope and Addison, when the distinctive feature of a great man's garden was stateliness. Here was the lovers' favourite loitering place when the night grew late, Juanita looking like Juliet in her loose white silk tea-gown, with its Venetian amplitude of sleeve and its mediæval gold embroidery. The fashionable dressmaker who made that gown had known how to adapt her art to Miss Dalbrook's beauty. The long straight folds accentuated every line of the finely moulded figure, fuller than the average girlish figure, suggestive of Juno rather than Psyche. She was two inches taller than the average girl, and looked almost as tall as her lover as she stood beside him in the moonlight, gazing dreamily at the landscape.

This hushed and solemn hour on the verge of midnight was their favourite time. Then only were they really alone, secure in the knowledge that all the household was sleeping, and that they had their world verily to themselves, and might be as foolish as they liked. Once, at sight of a shooting star, Juanita flung herself upon her lover's breast and sobbed aloud. It was some minutes before he could soothe her.

"My love, my love, what does it mean?" he asked, perplexed by her agitation.

"I saw the star, and I prayed that we might never be parted; and then it flashed upon me that we *might*, and I could not bear the thought," she sobbed, clinging to him like a frightened child.

"My dear one, what should part us, except death?"

"Ah, Godfrey, death is everywhere. How could a good God make His creatures so fond of each other and yet part them so cruelly as He does sometimes?"

"Only to unite them again in another world, Nita. I feel as if our two lives must go on in an endless chain, circling among those stars yonder, which could not have been made to be for ever unpeopled. There are happy lovers there at this instant, I am convinced—lovers who have lived before us here, and have been translated to a higher life yonder; lovers who have felt the pangs of parting, the ecstasy of reunion."

He glanced vaguely towards that starry heaven, while he fondly smoothed the dark hair upon Juanita's brow. It was not easy to win her back to cheerfulness. That vision of possible grief had too completely possessed her. Godfrey was fain to be serious, finding her spirits so shaken; so they talked together gravely of that unknown hereafter which philosophy or religion may map out with mathematical distinctness, but which remains to the individual soul for ever mysterious and awful.

Her husband found it wiser to talk of solemn things, finding her so sad, and she took comfort from that serious conversation.

"Let us lead good lives, dear, and hope for the best in other worlds," he said. "There is sound sense in the Buddhist theory, that we are the makers of our own spiritual destiny, and that a man may be in advance of his fellow men, even in getting to Heaven."

Those grave thoughts had little place in Juanita's mind next day, which was the first day the lovers devoted to practical things. They started directly after breakfast for a *tête-à-tête* drive to Milbrook Priory, where certain alterations and improvements were contemplated in the rooms which were to be Juanita's. Godfrey's widowed mother, Lady Jane Carmichael, had transferred herself and her belongings to a villa at Swanage, where she was devoting herself to the creation of a garden, which was, on a small scale, to repeat the beauties of her flat old-fashioned flower garden at the Priory. It irked her somewhat to think how long the hedges of yew and holly would take to grow; but there was a certain pleasure in creation. She was a mild, loving creature, with an aristocratic profile, silvery grey hair, and a small fragile figure; a woman who looked a patrician to her finger tips, and whom everybody imposed upon. Her blue blood had not endowed her with the power to rule. She adored her son, was very fond of Juanita, and resigned her place in her old home without a sigh.

"The Priory was a great deal too big for me," she told her particular friends. "I used to feel very dreary there when Godfrey was at Oxford, and afterwards, for of course he was often away. It was only in the shooting season that the house looked cheerful. I hope they will soon have a family, and then that will enliven the place a little."

Milbrook Village and Milbrook Priory lay twelve miles nearer Dorchester than Cheriton Chase. Juanita enjoyed the long drive in the fresh morning air through a region of marsh and watery meadow, where the cattle gave charm and variety to a landscape which would have been barren and monotonous without them, a place of winding streams on which the summer sunlight was shining.

The Priory was by no means so fine a place as Cheriton, but it was old, and not without interest, and Lady Jane was justified in the assertion that it was too large for her. It would be too small perhaps for Sir Godfrey and his wife in the days to come, when in the natural course of events James Dalbrook would be at rest after his life labour, and Cheriton would belong to Juanita.

"No doubt they will like Cheriton better than the Priory when we are all dead and gone," said Lady Jane, with her plaintive air. "I only hope they will have a family. Big houses are so dismal without little people."

This idea of a family was almost a craze with Lady Jane Carmichael. She had idolized her only son, had been miserable at every parting, and it had seemed a hard thing to her that there was not more of him, as she had herself expressed it.

"Godfrey has been the dearest boy. I only wish I had six of him," she would say piteously; and now her mind projected itself into the future, and she pictured a bevy of grandchildren—numerous as a covey of partridges in the upland fields of the home farm at Cheriton—and fancied herself lavishing her hoarded treasures of love upon them. She had grandchildren already, and to spare, the offspring of her two daughters, but these did not bear the honoured name of Carmichael, and, though they were very dear to her maternal heart, they were not what Godfrey's children would be to her.

She would be gone, she told herself, before they would be old enough to forsake her. She would be gone before those young birds grew too strong upon the wing. A blessed spell of golden years lay before her; a nursery, and then a schoolroom; and then, perhaps, before the last dim closing scene, a bridal, a granddaughter clinging to her in the sweet sadness of leave-taking, a fair young face crowned with orange flowers pressed against her own in the bride's happy kiss—and then she would say *Nunc dimittis*, and feel that her cup of gladness had been filled to the brim.

The lovers' talk was all of that shadowy future, as the pair of greys bowled gaily along the level road. The horses were Godfrey's favourite pair, and belonged to a team of chestnuts and greys which had won him some distinction last season in Hyde Park, when the coaches met at the corner by the Magazine, and when the handsome Miss Dalbrook, Lord Cheriton's heiress, was the cynosure of many eyes. The thoughts of Sir Godfrey and his wife were far from Hyde Park and the Four-in-Hand Club this morning. Their minds were filled with simple rural anticipations, and had almost a patriarchal turn, as of an Arcadian pair whose wealth was all in flocks and herds, and green pastures like these by which they were driving.

The Priory stood on low ground between Wareham and Wimbourne, sheltered from the north by a bold ridge of heath, screened on the east by a little wood of oaks and chestnuts, Spanish chestnuts, with graceful drooping branches, whose glossy leaves contrasted with the closer foliage of the rugged old oaks. The house was built of Purbeck stone, and its bluish grey was touched with shades of gold and silvery green where the lichens and mosses crept over it, while one long southern wall was clothed with trumpet-ash and magnolia, myrtle and rose, as with a closely interwoven curtain of greenery, from which the small latticed windows flashed back the sunshine.

Nothing at the Priory was so stately as its counterpart at Cheriton. There were marble balustrades and rural gods there on the terrace; here there was only a broad gravel walk along the southern front, with a little old shabby stone temple at each end. At Cheriton three flights of marble steps led from the terrace to the Italian

garden, and then again three more flights led to a garden on a lower level, and so by studied gradations to the bottom of the slope on which the mansion was built. Here house and garden were on the same level, and those gardens which Lady Jane had so cherished were distinguished only by an elegant simplicity. Between the garden and a park of less than fifty acres there was only a sunk fence, and the sole glory of that modest domain lay in a herd of choice Channel Island cows, which had been Lady Jane's pride. She had resigned them to Juanita without a sigh, although each particular beast had been to her as a friend.

"My dear, what could I do with cows in a villa?" she said, when Juanita suggested that she should at least keep her favourites, Beauty, and Maydew, and Coquette. "Of course, as you say, I could rent a couple of paddocks; but I should not like to see the herd divided. Besides, you will want them all by-and-by, when you have a family."

Nita stepped lightly across the threshold of her future home. The old grey porch was embedded in roses and trailing passion-flowers. Everything had a shabby, old-world look compared with Cheriton. Here there had been no improvement for over a century; all things had been quiescent as in the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty.

"What a dear old house it is, Godfrey, and how everything in it speaks to me of your ancestors—your own ancestors—not other people's! That makes all the difference. At Cheriton I feel always as if I were surrounded by malevolent ghosts. I can't see them, but I know they are there. Those poor Strangways, how they must hate me."

"If there are any living Strangways knocking about the world houseless, or at any rate landless, I don't suppose they feel over kindly disposed to you," said Godfrey; "but the ghosts have done with human habitations. It can matter very little to them who lives in the rooms where they were once happy or miserable, as the case may be. Has your father ever heard anything of the old family?"

"Never. He says there are no Strangways left on this hemisphere. There may be a remnant of the race in Australia," he says, "for he heard of a cousin of Reginald Strangway's who went out to Brisbane years ago to work with a sheep farmer on the Darling Downs. There is no one else of the old race and the old name that he can tell me about. I take a morbid interest in the subject, you know. If I were to meet a very evil-looking tramp in the woods and he were to threaten me, I should suspect him of being a Strangway. They all *must* hate us."

"With a very unreasonable hatred, then, Nita, for it was no fault of your father's that the family went to the bad. I have heard my father talk of the Strangways many a time over his wine. They had been a reckless, improvident race for ever so many generations,

men who lived only for the pleasure of the hour, whose motto was '*Carpe diem*' in the worst sense of the words. There was a Strangway who was the fashion for a short time during the Regency, wore a hat of his own invention, and got himself entangled with a popular actress, who sued him for breach of promise. *He* dipped the property. There was a racing Strangway who kept a stable at Newmarket and married—well—never mind how. *He* dipped the property. There was Georgiana Strangway, an heiress and a famous beauty, in the Sailor King's reign. Two of the Royal Dukes wanted to marry her; but she ran away with a bandmaster in the Blues. She used to ride in Hyde Park at nine o'clock every morning in a green cloth spencer trimmed with sable, at a time when very few women rode in London. She saw the bandmaster, fell over head and ears in love with him, and bolted. They were married at Gretna. He spent as much of her fortune as he could get at, and was reported to have thrashed her before they parted. She set up a boarding-house at Ostend, gambled, drank cheap brandy, and died at five-and-forty."

"What a dreadful ghost *she* would be to meet," said Nita, with a shudder.

"From first to last they have been a bad lot," concluded Sir Godfrey, "and the Isle of Purbeck was a prodigious gainer when your father became master of Cheriton Chase and Baron Cheriton of Cheriton."

"*That* is what they must feel worst of all," said Nita, speaking of the dead and the living as if they were one group of banished shades. "It must be hard for them to think that a stranger takes his title from the land that was once theirs, from the house in which they were born. Poor ill-behaved things, I can't help being sorry for them."

"My fanciful Nita, they do not deserve your pity. They make their own lives, love. They have only suffered the result of their own Karma."

"I only hope they will be better off in their next incarnations, and that they won't get to that dreadful eighth world which leads nowhere," said Juanita.

She made this light allusion to a creed which she and her lover had discussed seriously many a time in their graver moods. They had read Mr. Sinnett's books together, and had given themselves up in somewise to the fascinating theories of Esoteric Buddhism, and had been impressed by the curious parallel between that semi-fabulous Reformer of the East and the Teacher and Redeemer in whom they both believed.

They went about the house together, Nita admiring everything, as if she were seeing those old rooms for the first time. The alterations to be made were of the smallest. Nita would allow scarcely any change.

"Whatever was nice enough for Lady Jane must be good enough for me," she said, decisively, when Godfrey proposed improvements which would have changed the character of his mother's morning room, a conservatory, and a large bay window opposite the fireplace, for instance.

"But it is such a shabby old hole, compared with your room at Cheriton."

"It is a dear old hole, sir, and I won't have it altered in the smallest detail. I adore those deepset windows and wide window-seats; and this apple-blossom chintz is simply delicious. Faded, sir? What of that? One can't buy such patterns nowadays, for love or money. And that old Chinese screen must have belonged to a mandarin of the highest rank. My only feeling will be that I am a wretch in appropriating dear Lady Jane's surroundings. This room fitted her like a glove."

"She is charmed to surrender it to you, love; and your forbearance in the matter of improvement will delight her."

"Your improvements would have been destruction. A conservatory opening out of that window would suggest a city man's drawing-room at Tulse Hill. I have seen such in my childhood, when mother used to visit odd people on the Surrey side of the river."

"Loveliest insolence!"

"Oh, I am obliged to cultivate insolence. It is a parvenue's only defensive weapon. We new-made people always give ourselves more airs than you who were born in the purple."

She roamed from room to room, expatiating upon everything with a childlike pleasure, delighted at the idea of this her new kingdom, over which she was to reign with undivided sovereignty. Cheriton was ever so much grander; but at Cheriton she had only been the daughter of the house; indulged in every fancy, yet in somewise in a state of subjection. Here she was to be sole mistress, with Godfrey for her obedient slave.

"And now show me your rooms, sir," she exclaimed, with pretty authority. "I may wish to make some improvements *there*."

"You shall work your will with them, dearest, as you have done with their master."

He led her to his study and general den, a fine old room looking into the stable-yard, capacious, but gloomy.

"This is dreadful," she cried, "no view, and ever so far from *me!* You must have the room next the morning-room, so that we can run in to each other, and talk at any moment."

"That is one of the best bedrooms."

"What of that! We can do without superfluous bedrooms; but I cannot do without you. This room of yours will make a visitor's bedroom. If he or she doesn't like it, he or she can go away, and leave us to ourselves, which *we* shall like ever so much better,

shan't we?" she asked, caressingly, as if life were going to be one long honeymoon.

Of course he assented, kissed the red frank lips, and assured her that for him bliss meant a perpetual *tête-à-tête.* Yes, his study should be next her boudoir; so that even in his busiest hours he should be able to turn to her for gladness—refreshing himself with her smiles after a troublesome interview with his bailiff—taking counsel with her about every change in his stable, sharing her interest in every new book.

"I will give orders about the change at once," he said, "so that everything may be ready for us when you are tired of Cheriton."

They lunched gaily in the garden. Nita hated eating indoors when the weather was good enough for an *al fresco* meal. They lunched under a Spanish chestnut that made a tent of foliage on the lawn in front of the house. They lingered over the meal, full of talk, finding a new world of conversation suggested by their surroundings; and then the greys were brought round to the hall door, and they started on the return journey.

It began to rain before they reached Cheriton, and the afternoon clouded over with a look of premature winter. No saunterings on the terrace this evening; no midnight meanderings among the cypresses and yews, the gleaming statues and dense green walls; as if they had been Romeo and Juliet, wedded and happy, in the garden at Verona. For the first time since the beginning of their honeymoon they were obliged to stay indoors.

"It is positively chilly," exclaimed Juanita, as her maid carried off her damp mantle.

"My dearest love, I'm afraid you've caught cold," said Godfrey, with apprehension.

"Do I ever catch cold, Godfrey?" said cried, scornfully; and indeed her splendid physique seemed to negative the idea as she stood before him, tall and buoyant, with the carnation of health upon cheek and lips, her eyes sparkling, her head erect.

"Well, no, my Juno, I believe you are as free from all such weakness as human nature can be; but I shall order fires all the same, and I implore you to put on a warm gown."

"I will," she answered, gaily. "You shall see me in my copper plush."

"Thanks, love. That is a vision to live for."

"Shall we have tea in my dressing-room—or in yours?"

"In mine. I think we have taken tea in almost every other room in the house, as well as in every corner of the garden."

It had been one of her girlish caprices to devise new places for their afternoon tea. Whether it had been as keen a delight to the footmen to carry Japanese tables and bamboo chairs from pillar to post was open to question; but Juanita loved to colonize, as she called it.

"I feel that wherever we establish our teapot we invest the spot with the sanctity of home," she said.

Fires were ordered, and tea in Sir Godfrey's dressing-room.

It was Lord Dalbrook's dressing-room actually, and altogether a sacred chamber. It had been one of the best bedrooms in the days of the Strangways; but his Lordship liked space, and had chosen this room for his den—a fine old room, with full length portraits of the Sir Joshua period let into the panelling. The furniture was of the plainest, and very different from the luxurious appointments of the other rooms, for these very chairs and tables, and yonder substantial mahogany desk, had done duty in James Dalbrook's chambers in the Temple thirty years before. So had the heavy-looking clock on the chimney-piece, surmounted by a bronze Saturn leaning upon his scythe. So had the brass candlesticks, and the ink-stained red morocco blotter on the desk. He had fallen asleep in that capacious arm-chair many a time in the small hours, after struggling with the intricacies of a railway bill or poring over a volume of precedents.

The thick Persian carpet, the velvet window-curtains, panelled walls, and fine old fireplace gave a look of subdued splendour to the room, in spite of the dark and heavy furniture. There was a large vase of roses on the desk, where Lord Cheriton never tolerated a flower; and there were more roses on the chimney-piece; and some smart bamboo chairs, many coloured, like Joseph's coat, had been brought from Nita's morning room—and so, with logs blazing on the floriated iron dogs, and a scarlet tea-table set out with blue and gold china, and a Moorish copper kettle swinging over a lamp, the room had as gay an aspect as any one could desire.

Juanita had made her toilet by the time the tea-table was ready, and came in from her room next door, a radiant figure in a gleaming copper-coloured gown, flowing loose from throat to foot, and with no adornment except a broad collar and cuffs of old Venice point. Her brilliant complexion and southern eyes and ebon hair triumphed over the vivid hue of the gown, and it was at her Sir Godfrey looked as she came beaming towards him, and not at the dressmaker's master-piece.

"How do you like it?" she asked, with childlike pleasure in her fine raiment. "I ought to have kept it till October, but I couldn't resist putting it on, just to see what you think of it. I hope you won't say it's gaudy."

"My dearest, you might be clad in a russet cloud for anything I should know to the contrary. A quarter of a century hence, when you are beginning to fancy yourself *passée*, we will talk about gowns. It will be of some consequence then how you dress. It can be none now."

"That is just a man's ignorance, Godfrey," she said, shaking her finger at him, as she seated herself in one of the bamboo chairs, a

dazzling figure in the light of the blazing logs, which danced about her eyes and hair and copper-coloured gown in a bewildering manner. "You think me handsome, I suppose?"

"Eminently so.

"And you think I should be just as handsome if I dressed anyhow—in a badly-fitting Tussore, for instance, made last year and cleaned this year, and with a hat of my own trimming, eh, Godfrey?"

"Every bit as handsome."

"That shows what an ignoramus a University education can leave a man. My dearest boy, half my good looks depend upon my dressmaker. Not for worlds would I have you see me a dowdy, if only for a quarter of an hour. The disillusion might last a lifetime. I dress to please you, remember, sir. It was of you I thought when I was choosing my trousseau. I want to be lovely in your eyes always, always, always."

"You need make no effort to attain your wish. You have put so strong a spell upon my eyes that with me at least you are independent of the dressmaker's art."

"Again I say you don't know what you are talking about. But frankly now, do you think this gown too gaudy?"

"That coppery background to my Murillo Madonna. No, love; the colour suits you to perfection."

She poured out the tea, and then sank back in her comfortable chair, in a reverie, languid after her explorations at the Priory, full of a dreamlike happiness as she basked in the glow of the fire, welcome as a novel indulgence at this time of the year.

"There is nothing more delightful than a fire in July," she said.

Her eyes wandered about the room idly.

"Do you call them handsome?" she asked presently.

Godfrey looked puzzled. Was she still harping on the dress question, or was she challenging his admiration for those glorious eyes which he had been watching in their rovings for a lazy five minutes.

"I mean the Strangways. That is their famous beauty—the girl in the scanty white satin petticoat, with the goat. Imagine any one walking about a wood, with a goat, in white satin. What queer ideas portrait painters must have had in those days. She is very lovely though, isn't she?"

"She is not my ideal. I don't admire that narrow Cupid's-bow mouth, the lips pinched up as if they were pronouncing 'prunes and prism.' The eyes are large and handsome, but too round; the complexion is wax-dollish. No, she is not *my* ideal."

"I should have been miserable if you had admired her."

"There is a face in the hall which I like ever so much better, and yet I doubt if it is a good face."

"Which is that?"

"The face of the girl in that group of John Strangway's three children."

"That girl with the towsled hair and bright blue eyes. Yes, she must have been handsome—but she looks—I hope you won't be shocked, but I really can't help saying it—that girl looks a devil."

"Poor soul! Her temper did not do much good for her. I believe she came to a melancholy end."

"How was that?"

"She eloped from a school in Switzerland with an officer in a line regiment—a love match; but she went wrong a few years afterwards, left her husband, and died in poverty at Boulogne, I believe."

"Another ghost!" exclaimed Juanita, dolefully. "Poor, lost soul, she *must* walk. I can't help feeling sorry for her—married to a man who was unkind to her, perhaps, and whom she discovered unworthy of her love. And then years afterwards meeting some one worthier and better, whom she loved passionately. That is dreadful! Oh, Godfrey! if I had been married before I saw you—and we had met—and you had cared for me—God knows what kind of woman I should have been. Perhaps I should have been one of those poor souls who have a history, the women mother and her friends stare at and whisper about in the Park. Why are people so keenly interested in them, I wonder? Why can't they leave them alone?"

"It would be charity to do so."

"No one is charitable—in London."

"Do you think people are more indulgent in the country?"

"I suppose not. I'm afraid English people keep all their charity for the Continent. I shall never look at the girl in that group without thinking of her sad story. She looks hardly fifteen in the picture. Poor thing! She did not know what was coming."

They loitered over their tea-table, making the most of their happiness. The sweetness of their dual life had not begun to pall. It was still new and wonderful to be together thus, unrestrained by any other presence.

In the midst of their gay talk Juanita's eyes wandered to the bronze Time upon the chimney-piece, and the familiar figure suggested gloomy ideas.

"Oh, Godfrey! look at that grim old man with his scythe, mowing down our happy moments so fast that we can hardly taste their sweetness before they speed away. To think that our lives are hurrying past us like a rapid river, and that we shall be like him" (pointing distastefully to the type of old age—the wrinkled brow and flowing beard) "before we know that we have lived."

"It is a pity, sweet, that life should be so short."

Her glance wandered to the dark oak panel above the clock, and she started up from her low chair with a faint scream, stood on tiptoe before the fireplace, snatched half a dozen scraggy peacock's feathers from the panel, and threw them at her husband's feet.

"Look at those," she exclaimed, pointing to them as they lay there.

"Peacock's feathers! What have they done that you should use them so?"

"Oh, Godfrey, don't you know?" she asked, earnestly.

"Don't I know what?"

"That peacock's feathers bring ill luck. It is fatal to take them into a house. They are an evil omen. And father *will* pick them up when he is strolling about the lawn, and *will* bring them indoors; though I am always scolding him for his obstinate folly, and always throwing the horrid things away."

"And this kind of thing has been going on for some years, I suppose?" asked Godfrey, smiling at her intensity.

"Ever since I can remember."

"And have the peacock's feathers brought you misfortune?"

She looked at him gravely for a few moments, and then burst into a joyous laugh.

"No, no, no, no," she said, "Fate has been over kind to me. I have never known sorrow. Fate has given me *you*. I am the happiest woman in the world—for there can't be another *you*, and you are mine. It is like owning the Kohinoor diamond; one knows that one stands alone. Still, all the same, peacock's feathers are unlucky, and I will not suffer them in your room."

"She picked up the offending feathers, twisted them into a ball, and flung them at the back of the deep old chimney, behind the smouldering logs; and then she produced a chess board, and she and Godfrey began a game with the board on their knees, and played for an hour by firelight.

CHAPTER III.

"A deadly silence step by step increased,
Until it seemed a horrid presence there."

That idea of the Strangways had taken hold of the bride's fancy. She went into the hall with Godfrey after dinner, and they looked together at the family group. The picture was a bishop's half-length, turned lengthwise, and the figures showed only the head and shoulders. The girl stood between the two boys, her left arm round her younger brother's neck. He was a lad of eleven or twelve, in an Eton jacket and broad white collar. The other boy was older than the girl, and was dressed in dark green corduroy. The heads were masterly, but the picture was uninteresting.

"Did you ever see three faces with so little fascination among the three?" asked Godfrey. "The boys look arrant cubs; the girl has the makings of a handsome woman, but the lines of her mouth and

chin have firmness enough for forty, and yet she could hardly have been over fifteen when that picture was painted."

"She has a lovely throat and lovely shoulders."

"Yes, the painter has made the most of those."

"And she has fine eyes."

"Fine as to colour and shape, but as cold as a Toledo blade—and as dangerous. I pity her husband."

"That must be a waste of pity. If he had been good to her she would not have run away from him."

"I am not sure of that. A woman with that mouth and chin would go her own gate if she trampled upon bleeding hearts. I wonder your father keeps these shadows of a vanished race."

"He would not part with them for worlds. They are like the peacock's feathers that he *will* bring indoors. I sometimes think he has a fancy for unlucky things. He says that as we have no ancestors of our own—to speak of—I suppose we must *have* ancestors, for everybody must have come down from Adam somehow——"

"Naturally, or from Adam's ancestor, the common progenitor of the Darwinian thesis."

"Don't be horrid. Father's idea is that as we have no ancestors of our own, we may as well keep the Strangway portraits. The faces are the history of the house, father said, when mother wanted those dismal old pictures taken down to make way for a collection of modern art. So there they are, and I can't help thinking that they *overlook* us."

They were still standing before the trio of young faces contemplatively.

"Are they *all* dead?" asked Juanita, after a pause.

"God knows. I believe it is a long time since any of them were heard of. Jasper Blake talks to me about them sometimes. He was in service here, you know, before he became my father's bailiff. In fact, he only left Cheriton after the old squire's death. He is fond of talking of the forgotten race, and it is from him that most of my information is derived. He told me about that unlucky lad,"—pointing to the younger boy. "He was in the navy, distinguished himself out in China, and was on the high road to getting a ship when he got broke for drunkenness—a flagrant case, which all but ended in a tremendous disaster and the burning of a man-of-war. He went into the merchant service—did well for a year or two, and then the old enemy took hold of him again, and he got broke *there*. After that he dropped through—disappeared in the great dismal swamp where the men who fail in this world sink out of knowledge."

"And the elder boy; what became of him?"

"He was in the army—a tremendous swell, I believe,—married Lord Dangerfield's youngest daughter, and cut a dash for two or three years, and then disappeared from society, and took his wife to Corsica, on the ground of delicate health. For anything I know to

the contrary they may still be living in that free-and-easy little island. He was fond of sport, and liked a rough life. I fancy that Ajaccio would suit him better than Purbeck or Pall Mall."

"Poor things; I wonder if they ever long for Cheriton?"

"If old Jasper is to be believed, they were passionately fond of the place, especially that girl. Jasper was groom in those days, and he taught her to ride. She was a regular dare-devil, according to his account, with a temper that no one had ever been able to control. But she seems to have behaved pretty well to Jasper, and he was attached to her. Her father couldn't manage her anyhow. They were too much alike. He sent her to a school at Lausanne soon after that picture was painted, and she never came back to Cheriton. She ran away with an English officer who was home from India on furlough, and was staying at Ouchy for his health. She represented herself as of full age, and contrived to get married at Geneva. The squire refused ever to see her or her husband. She ran away from the husband afterwards, as I told you. In fact, to quote Jasper, she was an incorrigible bolter."

"Poor, poor thing. It is all too sad," sighed Juanita. "Let us go into the library and forget them. There are no Strangways there, thank Heaven."

She put her arm through Godfrey's and led him off, unresisting. He was in that stage of devotion in which he followed her like a dog.

The library was one of the best rooms in the house, but the least interesting from an archæologist's point of view. It had been built early in the eighteenth century for a ballroom, a long narrow room, with five tall windows, and it had been afterwards known as the music-room; but James Dalbrook had improved it out of its original character by throwing out a large bay, with three windows opening on to a semicircular terrace, with marble balustrade and steps leading down to the prettiest portion of that Italian garden which was the crowning glory of Cheriton Manor, and which it had been Lord Cheriton's delight to improve. The spacious bay gave width and dignity to the room, and it was in the space between the bay and the fireplace that people naturally grouped themselves. It was too large a room to be warmed by one fire of ordinary dimensions, but the fireplace added by James Dalbrook was of abnormal width and grandeur, while the chimney-piece was rich in coloured marbles and massive sculpture. The room was lined with books from floor to ceiling. Clusters of wax candles were burning on the mantel-piece, and two large moderator lamps stood on a massive carved oak table in the centre of the room—a table spacious enough to hold all the magazines, reviews, and periodicals in three languages that were worth reading—Quarterlies, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, *Rundschau*, *Figaro*, *World*, *Saturday*, *Truth*, and the rest of them—as well as guide-books, peerages, clergy and army lists—which made a formidable range in the middle.

Godfrey flung himself into a long, low, arm-chair, and Juanita perched herself lightly beside him on the cushioned arm, looking down at him from that point of vantage. There was a wood fire here as well as in the hall; but the rain was over now, the evening had grown warmer, and the French windows in the bay stood open to the dull grey night.

"What are you reading now, Godfrey?" asked Juanita, glancing at the cosy double table in a corner by the chimney-piece, loaded with books above and below.

"For duty reading Jones' book on 'Grattan and the Irish Parliament;' for old books 'Plato;' for new 'Wider Horizons.'"

He was an insatiable reader, and even in those long summer days of honeymoon bliss he had felt the need of books, which were a habit of his life.

"Is 'Wider Horizons' a good book?"

"It is full of imagination, and it carries one away; but one has the same feeling as in 'Esoteric Buddhism.' It is a very comforting theory, and it ought to be true; but by what authority is this gospel preached to us, and on what evidence are we to believe?"

"'Wider Horizons' is about the life to come?"

"Yes; it gives us a very vivid picture of our existence in other planets. The author writes as if he had been there."

"And according to this theory you and I are to meet and be happy again in some distant star?"

"In many stars—climbing from star to star, and achieving a higher spirituality, a finer essence, with every new existence, until we attain the everlasting perfection."

"And we who are to die old and worn out here are to be young and bright again there—in our next world?"

"Naturally."

"And then we shall grow old again—go through the same slow decay—grey hairs, fading sight, duller hearing?"

"Yes; as we blossom so must we fade. The withered husk of the old life holds the seed from which the new flower must spring; and with every incarnation the flower is to gain in vigour and beauty, and the life period is to lengthen till it touches infinity."

"I must read the book, Godfrey. It may be all a dream; but I love even dreams that promise a future in which you and I shall always be together—as we are now, as we are now."

She repeated those last four words with infinite tenderness. The beautiful head sank down to nestle upon his shoulder, and they were silent for some minutes in a dreamy reverie, gazing into the fire, where the logs had given out their last flame, and were slowly fading from red to grey.

It was a quarter to eleven by the dial let into the marble of the chimney-piece. The butler had brought a tray with wine and water at ten o'clock, and had taken the final orders before retiring.

Juanita and her husband were alone amid the stillness of the sleeping household. The night was close and dull, not a leaf stirring, and only a few dim stars in the heavy sky.

As the clock told the third quarter with a small silvery chime, as if it were a town clock in fairyland, Juanita started suddenly from her half-reclining position, and listened intently, with her face towards the open window.

"A footstep!" she exclaimed. "I heard a footstep on the terrace."

"My dearest, I know your hearing is quicker than mine; but this time it is your fancy that heard and not your ears. I heard nothing. And who should be walking on the terrace at such an hour, do you suppose?"

"I don't suppose anything about it, but I know there was some one. I heard the steps, Godfrey. I heard them as distinctly as I heard you speak just now; light footsteps—slow, very slow, and with that cautious, treacherous sound which light, slow footsteps always have, if one hears them in the silence of night."

"You are very positive."

"I know it, I heard it!" she cried, running to the window, and out into the grey night.

She ran along the whole length of the terrace and back again, her husband following her with slower steps, and they found no one, heard nothing from one end to the other.

"You see, love, there was no one there," said Godfrey.

"I see nothing of the kind—only that the some one who was there has vanished very cleverly. An eavesdropper might hide easily enough behind any one of those cypresses," she said, pointing to the obelisk-shaped trees which showed black against the dim grey of the night.

"Why should there be any eavesdropper, love? What secrets have you and I that any prowler should care to watch or listen. The only person of the prowling kind to be apprehended would be a burglar; and as Cheriton has been burglar-free all these years, I see no reason for fear; so, unless your mysterious footfall belonged to one of the servants or a servant's follower, which is highly improbable on this side of the house, I take it that you must have heard a ghost."

He had his arm around her, and was leading her out of the misty night into the warm, bright room, and his voice had the light sound of laughter; but at that word ghost she started and trembled, and her voice was very serious as she answered—

"A ghost, yes! It was just *like* the footfall of a ghost—so slow, so soft, so mysterious. I believe it was a ghost, Godfrey—a Strangway ghost. Some of them *must* revisit this house."

CHAPTER IV

"Who will dare
To pluck thee from me? And of thine own will,
Full well I feel that thou wouldst not leave me."

THE sunshine of a summer morning, streaming in through mullioned windows that looked due south, raised Juanita's spirits, and dispersed her fears. It was impossible to feel depressed under such a sky. She had been wakeful for a considerable part of the night, brooding upon that ghostly footstep which had sent such a sudden chill to her warm young heart, but that broad clear light of morning brought common sense.

"I dare say it was only some lovesick housemaid, roaming about after all the others had gone to bed, in order to have a quiet think about her sweetheart, and what he said to her last Sunday as they went home from church. I know how *I* used to walk about with no company but my thoughts of you, Godfrey, and how sweet it used to be to go over all your dearest words—over and over again,—and no doubt the heart of a housemaid is worked by just the same machinery that sets mine going—and her thoughts would follow the same track."

"That is what we are taught to believe, dearest, in this enlightened age."

"Why should it be a ghost?" pursued Juanita, leaning back in her bamboo chair, and lazily enjoying the summer morning, somewhat languid after a sleepless night.

They were breakfasting at the western end of the terrace, with an awning over their heads, and a couple of footmen travelling to and from the house in attendance upon them, and keeping respectfully out of earshot between whiles. The table was heaped with roses, and the waxen chalices of a great magnolia on the lower level showed above the marble balustrade, and shed an almost overpowering perfume on the warm air.

"'Why should a ghost come now?" she asked, harping upon her morbid fancies. "There has never been a hint of a ghost in all the years that father and mother have lived here. Why should one come now, unless——"

"Unless what, love?"

"Unless one of the Strangways died last night—at the very moment when we heard the footfall—died in some distant land, perhaps, and with his last dying thought revisited the place of his birth. One has heard of such things."

"One has heard of a great many strange things. The human imagination is very inventive."

"Ah, you are a sceptic, I know. I don't think I actually believe in ghosts—but I am afraid of being forced to believe in them. Oh, Godfrey, if it were meant for a warning," she cried, with sudden terror in the large dark eyes.

"What kind of warning?"

"A presage of misfortune—sickness—death. I have read so many stories of such warnings."

"My dearest love, you have read too much rubbish in that line. Your mind is full of morbid fancies. If the morning were not too warm, I should say put on your habit and let us go for a long ride. I am afraid this sauntering life of ours is too depressing for you."

"Depressing—to be with you all day! Oh, Godfrey, *you* must be tired of *me* if you can suggest such a thing."

"But, my Nita, when I see you giving yourself up to gloomy speculations about ghosts and omens."

"Oh, that means nothing. When one has a very precious treasure one must needs be full of fears. Look at misers; how nervous they are about their hidden gold. And my treasure is more to me than all the gold of Ophir—infinitely precious."

She sprang up from her low chair, and leaned over the back of his to kiss the broad brow which was lifted up to meet those clinging lips.

"Oh, my love, my love, I never knew what fear meant till I knew the fear of parting from you," she murmured.

"Put on your habit, Nita. We will go for a ride in spite of the sun. Or what do you say to driving to Dorchester, and storming your cousins for a lunch? I want to talk to Mr. Dalbrook about Skinner's bill of dilapidations."

Her mood changed in an instant.

"That would be capital fun," she cried. "I wonder if it is a breach of etiquette to lunch with one's cousins during one's honeymoon?"

"A fig for etiquette. Thomas," to an approaching footman, "order the phaeton for half-past eleven."

"What a happy idea," said Juanita, "a long, long drive with you, and then the fun of seeing how you get on with my strong-minded cousins. They pretend to despise everything that other girls care for, don't you know; and go in for literature, science, politics, everything intellectual, in short; and I have seen them sit and nurse Darwin or Buckle for a whole evening, while they have talked of gowns and bonnets and other girls' flirtations."

"Then they are not such Roman maidens as they affect to be."

"Far from it. They will take the pattern of my frock with their eyes before I have been in the room ten minutes. Just watch them."

"I will; if I can take my eyes off you."

Juanita ran away to change her white peignoir for a walking-

dress, and reappeared in half an hour radiant and ready for the drive.

"How do you like my frock?" she asked, posing herself in front of her husband, and challenging admiration.

The frock was old gold Indian silk, soft and dull, made with an exquisite simplicity of long flowing draperies, over a kilted petticoat which just showed the neat little tan shoes, and a glimpse of tan silk stocking. The bodice fitted the tall supple figure like a glove; the sleeves were loose and short, tied carelessly at the elbow with a broad satin ribbon, and the long suéde gloves matched the gown to the nicest shade. Her hat was leghorn, broad enough to shade her eyes from the sun, high enough to add to her importance, and caught up on one side with a bunch of dull yellow barley and a few cornflowers, whose vivid hue was repeated in a cluster of the same flowers embroidered on one side of the bodice. Her large sunshade was of the same silk as her gown, and that was also embroidered with cornflowers, a stray blossom flung here and there with an accidental air.

"My love, you look as if you had stepped out of a fashion book."

"I suppose I am too smart," said Juanita with an impatient sigh; "and yet my colouring is very subdued. There is only that touch of blue in the cornflowers—just the one high light in the picture. That is the only drawback to country life. Everything really pretty seems too smart for dusty roads and green lanes. One must be content to grope one's obscure way in a tailor gown or a cotton frock all the year round. Now this would be perfection for a Wednesday in Hyde Park, wouldn't it?"

"My darling, it is charming. Why should you not be prettily dressed under this blue summer sky? You can sport your tailor gowns in winter. You are not too smart for me, Nita. You are only too lovely. Bring your dust cloak, and you may defy the perils of the road."

Celestine, Lady Carmichael's French-Swiss maid, was in attendance with the dust cloak, an ample wrap of creamy silk and lace, cloudlike, indescribable. This muffled the pretty gown from top to toe, and Nita took her seat in the phaeton, and prepared for a longer drive and a longer talk than they had had yesterday.

She was pleased at the idea of showing off her handsome young husband and her new frock to those advanced young ladies, who had affected a kind of superiority on the ground of what she called "heavy reading," and what they called advanced views. Janet and Sophia had accepted Lady Cheriton's invitations with inward protest, and in their apprehension of being patronized had been somewhat inclined to give themselves airs, taking pains to impress upon their cousin that she was as empty-headed as she was beautiful, and that they stood upon an intellectual plane for which she had no scaling ladder. She had put up with such small snubbings in the

sweetest way, knowing all the time that as the Honourable Juanita Dalbrook, of Cheriton Chase, and one of the débutantes whose praises had been sung in all the society papers, she inhabited a social plane as far beyond their reach as their intellectual plane might be above hers.

"I don't suppose we shall see Theodore," said Juanita, as the bays bowled merrily along the level road.

The greys were getting a rest after yesterday's work, and these were Lady Cheriton's famous barouche horses, to whom the phaeton seemed a toy.

"He must have gone to Heidelberg before now," added Juanita.

"He must be fond of Heidelberg to be running off there when it is so jolly at home."

"He was there for a year, you know, before he went to Cambridge, and he is always going back there or to the Hartz for his holidays. I sometimes tell him he is half a German."

She rather hoped that Theodore was in Germany by this time; and yet she had assured herself in her own mind that there could be no pain to him in their meeting. She knew that he had loved her—that in one rash hour, after a year's absence in America, when he had not known, or had chosen to forget, the state of affairs between her and Godfrey, he had told her of his love, and had asked her to give him hope. It was before her engagement; but she was not the less frank in confessing her attachment to Godfrey. "I can never care for any one else," she said; "I have loved him all my life."

All her life! Yes, that was Theodore's irreparable loss. While he, the working man, had been grinding out his days in the treadmill round of a country solicitor's office, the young patrician had been as free as the butterflies in Juanita's rose garden; free to woo her all day long, free to share her most trifling pleasures and sympathize with her lightest pains. What chance had the junior partner in Dalbrook & Son against Sir Godfrey Carmichael of Milbrook Priory?

Theodore had managed his life so well after that one bitter rebuff that Juanita had a right to suppose that his wound had healed, and that the pain of that hour had been forgotten. She was sincerely attached to him, as a kinsman, and respected him more than any other young man of her acquaintance. Had not Lord Cheriton, that admirable judge of character, declared that Theodore was one of the cleverest men he knew, and regretted that he had not attached himself to the higher branch of the law, as the more likely in his case to result in wealth and fame?

The phaeton drove up to the old Hanoverian doorway as St. Peter's clock chimed the quarter after one. The old man-servant looked surprised at this brilliant vision of a beautiful girl, a fine pair of horses, a smart groom, and Sir Godfrey Carmichael. The *tout-ensemble* was almost bewildering even to a man accustomed to see

the various conveyances of neighbouring landowners at his master's door.

"Yes, my lady, both the young ladies are at home," said Brown, and led the way upstairs with unshaken dignity.

He had lived in that house five-and-thirty years, beginning as shoe-black and errand boy, and he was proud to hear his master tell his friends how he had risen from the ranks. He had indulged in some mild philanderings with pretty parlour-maids in the days of his youth, but had never seriously entangled himself, and was a confirmed bachelor, and something of a misogynist. He was a pattern of honesty and conscientiousness, having no wife and family to be maintained upon broken victuals and illuminated with filched candle-ends or stolen oil. He had not a single interest outside his master's house, hardly so much as a thought; and the glory and honour of "family" were his honour and glory. So, as he ushered Lady Carmichael and her husband to the drawing-room, he was meditating upon what additions to the luncheon he could suggest to cook which might render that meal worthy of such distinguished guests.

Sophia was seated by one of the windows, painting an orchid in a tall Venetian vase. It was a weakness with these clever girls to think they could do everything. They were not content with Darwin and the new learning, but they painted indifferently in oils and in water colours, played on various instruments, sang in three languages, and fancied themselves invincible at lawn tennis.

The orchid was top-heavy, and had been tumbling out of the vase every five minutes in a manner that that had been very trying to the artist's temper, and irritating to Janet, who was grappling with a volume of Johann Müller, in the original, and losing herself in a labyrinth of words beginning with *ver* and ending with *heit*.

They both started up from occupations of which both were tired, and welcomed their visitors with a show of genuine pleasure; for although they had been very determined in their resistance to anything like patronage on Juanita's part when she was Miss Dalbrook, they were glad that she should be prompt to recognize the claims of kindred now that she was Lady Carmichael.

"How good of you to come!" exclaimed Janet. "I didn't think you would remember us, at such at time."

"Did you think I must forget old friends because I am happy?" said Juanita. "But I mustn't take credit for other people's virtues. It was Godfrey who proposed driving over to see you."

"I wanted to show you what a nice couple we make," said Sir Godfrey, gaily, drawing his bride closer to him, as they stood side by side, tall and straight, and glowing with youth and gladness, in the middle of the grave old drawing-room. "You young ladies were not so cousinly as your brother Theodore. *You* didn't drive to Cheriton to welcome us home."

"If Theo had told us what he was going to do we should have

been very glad to be there too," replied Sophy, "but he rode off in the morning without saying a word to anybody."

"He is in Germany by this time, I suppose?" said Juanita.

"He is downstairs in the office. His portmanteau has been packed for a week, I believe," explained Janet, "but there is always some fresh business to prevent his starting. My father relies upon him more every day."

"Dear, good Theodore, he is quite the cleverest man I know," said Juanita, without the slightest idea of disparaging her husband, whom she considered perfection. "I think he must be very much like what my father was at his age."

"People who are in a position to know tell us that he is exactly what his *own* father was at that age," said Janet, resenting this attempt to trace her brother's gifts to a more distant source. "I don't see why one need go further. My father would not have been trusted as he has been for the last thirty years if he were a simpleton; and Galton observes——"

The door opened at this moment, and Theodore came in.

He greeted his cousin and his cousin's husband with unaffected friendliness.

"It it against my principles to take luncheon," he said, laughingly, as he gave Juanita his hand, "but this is a red-letter day. My father is waiting for us in the dining-room."

They all went down stairs together, Theodore leading the way with his cousin, talking gaily as they went down the wide oak staircase, between sober panelled walls of darkest brown. The front part of the ground floor was given up to offices, and the dining-room was built out at the back, a large bright-looking room with a bay window, opening on to a square town garden, a garden of about half an acre, surrounded with high walls, above which showed the treetops in one of the leafy walks that skirt the town. It was very different to that Italian garden at Cheriton, where the peacocks strutted slowly between long rows of cypresses, where the Italian statues showed white in every angle of the dense green wall, and where the fountain rose and fell with a silvery cadence in the still summer atmosphere. Here there was only a square lawn, just big enough for a tennis court, and a broad border of hardy flowers, with one especial portion at the end of the garden, where Sophia experimented in cross fertilization after the manner of Darwin, seeming for ever upon the threshold of valuable discoveries.

Mr. Dalbrook was a fine-looking man of some unascertained age between fifty and sixty. He boasted that he was Lord Cheriton's junior by a year or two, although they had both come to a time of life when a year or two more or less could matter very little.

He was very fond of Juanita, and he welcome her with especial tenderness in her new character as a bride. He kissed her, and then held her away from him for a minute, with a kindly scrutiny.

"Lady Godfrey surpasses Miss Dalbrook," he said, smiling at the girl's radiant face. "I suppose now you are going to be the leading personage in our part of the county. We quiet townspeople will be continually hearing of you, and there will not be a local paper without a notice of your doings. Anyhow, I am glad you don't forget old friends."

He placed her beside him at the large oval table, on which the handsomest plate and the oldest china had been set forth with a celerity which testified to Brown's devotion. Mr. Dalbrook was one of those sensible people who never waste keep or wages upon a bad horse or a bad servant, whereby his cook was one of the best in Dorchester; so the luncheon, albeit plain and unpretentious, was a meal of which no man need feel ashamed.

Juanita was fond of her uncle, as she called this distant cousin of hers, to distinguish him from the younger generation, and she was pleased to be sitting by him, and hearing all the news of the county town and the county people who were his clients, and in many cases his friends. It may be that his cousinship with Lord Cheriton had gone as far as his professional acumen to elevate him in the esteem of town and county, and that some people who would hardly have invited the provincial solicitor for own sake, sent their cards as a matter of course to the law lord's cousin. But there were others who esteemed Matthew Dalbrook for his own sterling qualities, and who even liked him better than the somewhat severe and self-assertive Lord Cheriton.

While Juanita talked confidentially to her kinsman, and while Sir Godfrey discussed the latest theory about the sun, and the probable endurance of our own little planet, with Janet and Sophia, Theodore sat at the bottom of the table, silent and thoughtful, watching the lovely animated face with its look of radiant happiness, and telling himself that the woman he loved was as far away from him sitting there, within reach of his touch, within the sound of his lowest whisper, as if she had been in another world. He had borne himself bravely on her wedding-day, and smiled back her happy smile, and clasped her hand with a steady grip of friendship; but after that ordeal there had been a sad relapse in his fortitude, and he had thought of her ever since as a man thinks of that supreme possession without which life is worthless—as the miser thinks of his stolen gold—or the ambitious man of his blighted name.

Yes, he had loved her with all the strength of his heart and mind, and he knew that he could never again love with the same full measure. He was too wise a man, and too experienced in life, to tell himself that for him time could have no healing power—that no other woman could ever be dear to him; but he told himself that another love like unto this was impossible, and that all the future could bring him would be some pale faint copy of this radiant picture.

"I suppose it's only one man in fifty who marries his first love," he thought; and then he looked at Godfrey Carmichael and thought that to him overmuch had been given. He was a fine young fellow, clever, unassuming, with a frank good face; a man who was liked by men as well as by women; but what had he done to be worthy of such a wife as Juanita? Theodore could only answer the question in the words of Figaro, "He had taken the trouble to be born."

That one thoughtful guest made no difference in the gaiety of the luncheon table. Matthew Dalbrook had plenty to say to his beautiful cousin, and Juanita had all the experiences of the last season to talk about, while once having started upon Sir William Thomson and the ultimate exhaustion of the sun's heat, the sisters were not likely to stop.

CHAPTER V.

"Poor little life that toddles half an hour,
Crowned with a flower or two, and there an end—"

Sir Godfrey's device for diverting his wife's mind from the morbid fancies of the previous night answered admirably. She left Dorchester in high spirits, after having invited her cousins to Cheriton for tennis and lunch on the following day, and after having bade an affectionate good-bye to Theodore, who was to start on his holiday directly he could make an end of some important business now in hand. His father told him laughingly that he might have gone a week earlier had he really wanted to go.

"I believe there must be some attraction for you in Dorchester, though I am not clever enough to find out what it is," said Mr. Dalbrook, innocently, "for you have been talking about going away for the last fortnight, and yet you don't go."

Lady Carmichael had lingered in the homely old house till afternoon tea, had lingered over her tea, telling her cousins all they wanted to know about smart society in London, that one central spot of bright white light in the dull, grey mass of a busy, commonplace world, of which she knew so much, and of which they knew so little. Janet and Sophia professed to be above caring for these things, except from a purely philosophical point of view, as they cared for ants, bees, and wasps; but they listened eagerly all the same, with occasional expressions of wonder that human beings could be so trivial.

"Five hundred pounds spent in flowers at Lady Drumlock's ball!" cried Sophy, "and to think that in a few more million years the

sun may be as cold as the north pole, and what trace will there be then of all this butterfly world?"

"Did the Mountains cut a tremendous dash this season?" asked Janet, frivolously curious about their immediate neighbours, county people who went to London for the season. "Of course you know she had thirty thousand pounds left her by an uncle quite lately. And she is so utterly without brains that I dare say she will spend it all in entertainments."

"Oh, they did entertain a good deal, and they did their best, poor things, and people went to them," Juanita answered, with a deprecating air; "but still I should hardly like to say that they are *in* society. In the first place, she has never succeeded in getting the Prince at any of her dances; and in the next place, her parties have a cloud of provincial dulness upon them, against which it is in vain to struggle. He can never forget his constituents and his duty to his borough, and that kind of thing does not answer if one wants to give really nice parties. I'm afraid her legacy won't do her much good, poor soul, unless she gets some clever person to show her how to spend it. There is a kind of society instinct, don't you know, and she is without it. I believe the people who give good parties are born, not made—like poets and orators."

Sir Godfrey looked down at her, smiling at her juvenile arrogance, which, to his mind, was more bewitching than another woman's humility.

"We mean to show them the way next year, if we take a house in town," he said.

"But we are not going to have a house in town," answered Juanita, quickly. "Why, Godfrey, you know I have done with all that kind of frivolity. We can go to Victoria Street in May, and stay with our people there long enough to see all the pictures and hear some good music, and just rub shoulders with the friends we like at half a dozen parties, and then we will go back to our nest at the Priory. Do you think that I am like Lady Mountain, and want to waste my life upon the society struggle, when I have *you*?"

It was after five o'clock when they left Dorchester. It was more than half-past seven when they drew near Cheriton, and the sun was setting behind the irregular line of hills towards Studland. They approached the Manor by one of the most picturesque lanes in the district, a lane sunk between high banks, rugged and rocky, and with here and there a massive trunk of beech or oak jutting out above the roadway, while the gnarled and twisted roots spread over the rough, shelving ground, and seemed to hold up the meadow-land upon the higher level: a dark, secret-looking lane it must have seemed on a moonless night, sunk so deeply between those earth walls, and overshadowed by those gigantic trunks and interlacing branches; but in this mellow evening light it was a place in which to linger. There was a right of way through Cheriton Chase, and

this sunk lane was the favourite approach. A broad carriage drive crossed the Chase and park, skirted the great elm avenue that led to the house, and swept round by a wide semi-circle to the great iron gates which opened on the high-road from Wareham.

The steep gable ends of an old English cottage rose amidst the trees, on the upper ground just outside the gate at the end of the lane. It was a veritable old English cottage, and had been standing at that corner of the park-like meadow for more than two hundred years, and had known but little change during those two centuries. It was a good deal larger than the generality of lodges, and it differed from other lodges insomuch as it stood outside the gate instead of inside, and on a higher level than the road; but it was a lodge all the same, and the duty of the person who lived in it was to open the gate of Cheriton Chase to all comers, provided they came in such vehicles as were privileged to enjoy the right of way. There was a line drawn somewhere; perhaps at coal waggons or tradesmen's carts; but for the generality of vehicles the carriage road across Cheriton Chase was free.

A rosy-faced girl of about fourteen came tripping down the stone steps built into the bank as the carriage approached, and was curtseying at the open gate in time for Sir Godfrey to drive through without slackening the pace. He gave her a friendly nod as he passed.

"Does Mrs. Porter never condescend to open the gate herself?" he asked Juanita.

"Seldom for any one except my father. I think she makes a point of doing it for him, though I believe he would much rather she didn't. You mustn't sneer at her, Godfrey. She is a very unassuming person, and very grateful for her comfortable position here, though she has known better days, poor soul."

"That is always such a vague expression. What were the better days like?"

"She is the widow of a captain—in the mercantile marine, I think it is called—a man who was almost a gentleman. She was left very poor, and my father, who knew her husband, gave her the lodge to take care of, and a tiny pension—not so much as I spend upon gloves and shoes, I'm afraid; and she has lived here contentedly and gratefully for the last ten years. It must be a sadly dull life, for she is an intellectual woman, too refined to associate with upper servants and village tradespeople; so she has no one to talk to—literally no one—except when the Vicar, or any of us call upon her. But that is not the worst, poor thing," pursued Juanita, dropping her voice to a subdued and sorrowful tone; "she had a great trouble some years ago. You remember, don't you, Godfrey?"

"I blush to say that Mrs. Porter's trouble has escaped my memory."

"Oh, you have been so much away; you would hardly hear any-

thing about it, perhaps. She had an only daughter—her only child—a very handsome girl, whom she educated most carefully; and the girl went wrong, and disappeared. I never heard the circumstances. I was not supposed to know, but I know she vanished suddenly, and that there was a good deal of fuss with mother, and the servants, and the Vicar; and Mrs. Porter's hair began to whiten from that time, and people who had not cared much for her before were so sorry that they grew quite fond of her."

"It is a common story enough," said Godfrey, "what could a handsome girl do—except go wrong—in such a life as that. Did she open the gate while she was here?"

"Only for my father, I believe. Mrs. Porter has always contrived to keep a girl in a pinafore, like that girl you saw just now. All the girls come from the same family, or have done for the last six or seven years. As soon as the girl grows out of her pinafores she goes off to some better service, and a younger sister drops into her place."

"And her pinafores, I suppose."

"Mrs. Porter's girls always do well. She has a reputation for making a good servant out of the raw material."

"A clever woman, no doubt; very clever, to have secured a lodge-keeper's berth without being obliged to open the gate; a woman who knows how to take care of herself."

"You ought not to disparage her, Godfrey. The poor thing has known so much trouble—think of what it was to lose the daughter she loved—and in such a way—worse than death."

"I don't know about that. Death means the end. A loving mother might rather keep the sinner than lose the saint, and the sinner may wash herself clean and become a saint—after the order of Mary Magdalene. If this Mrs. Porter had been really devoted to her daughter she would have followed her and brought her back to the fold. She would not be here, leading a life of genteel idleness in that picturesque old cottage while the lost sheep is still astray in the wilderness."

"You are very hard upon her, Godfrey."

"I am hard upon all shams and pretences. I have not spoken to Mrs. Porter above half a dozen times in my life—she never opens the gate for me, you know—but I have a fixed impression that she is a hypocrite—a harmless hypocrite, perhaps—one of those women whose chief object in life is to stand well with the Vicar of her parish."

They were at the hall door by this time, and it was a quarter to eight.

"Let us sit in the drawing-room this evening, Godfrey," said Juanita, as she ran off to dress for dinner. "The library would give me the horrors after last night."

"My capricious one. You will be tired of the drawing-room to-

morrow. I should not be surprised if you ordered me to sit on the housetop. We might rig up a tent for afternoon tea between two chimney stacks."

Juanita made a rapid toilet, and appeared in one of her graceful cream-white tea-gowns, veiled in a cloud of softest lace, just as the clocks were striking eight. She was all gaiety to-night, just as she had been all morbid apprehension last night; and when they went to the drawing-room after dinner—together, for it was not to be supposed that Sir Godfrey would linger over a solitary glass of claret—she flew to the grand piano and began to play Tito Mattei's famous waltz, which seemed the most consummate expression of joyousness possible to her. The brilliant music filled the atmosphere with gaiety, while the face of the player, turned to her husband as she played, harmonized with the lighthearted melody.

The drawing-room was as frivolously pretty as the library was soberly grand. It was Lady Cheriton's taste which had ruled here, and the room was a kind of record of her ladyship's travels. She had bought pretty things or curious things wherever they took her fancy, and had brought them home to her Cheriton drawing-room. Thus the walls were hung with Algerian embroideries on damask or satin, and decorated with Rhodian pottery. The furniture was a mixture of old French and old Italian. The Dresden tea services and ivory statuettes, and *capo di monte* vases, and Copenhagen figures, had been picked up all over the Continent, without any regard to their combined effect; but there were so many things that the ultimate result was delightful, the room being spacious enough to hold everything without the slightest appearance of over-crowding.

The piano stood in a central position, and was draped with a Japanese robe of state—a mass of rainbow-hued embroidery on a ground of violet satin almost covered with gold thread. It was the most gorgeous fabric Godfrey Carmichael had ever seen, and it made the piano a spot of vivid parti-coloured light, amidst the more subdued colouring of the room—the silvery silken curtains, the delicate Indian muslin draperies, and the dull tawny plush coverings of sofas and chairs.

The room was lighted only by clusters of wax candles, and a reading-lamp on a small table near one of the windows. It was a rule that wherever Sir Godfrey spent his evening there must always be a reading-table and lamp ready for him.

He showed no eagerness for his books yet awhile, but seemed completely happy lolling at full length on a sofa near the piano, listening and watching as Juanita played. She played more of Mattei's brilliant music—another waltz—an arrangement of *Non è ver*—and then dashed into one of Chopin's wildest mazurkas, with an audacious self-abandonment that was almost genius.

Godfrey listened rapturously, delighted with the music for its own sake, but even more delighted for the gladness which it expressed.

She stopped at last, breathless, after Mendelssohn's Capriccio. Godfrey had risen from the sofa and was standing by her side.

"I'm afraid I must have tired you to death," she said, "but I had a strange sort of feeling that I must go on playing. That music was a safety-valve for my high spirits."

"My darling, I am so glad to see that you have done with imaginary woes. We may have real troubles of some kind to face by-and-by, perhaps, as we go down the hill, so it would be very foolish to abandon ourselves to fancied sorrows while we are on the top."

"Real troubles—yes—sickness, anxiety, the fear of parting," said Juanita, in a troubled voice. "Oh, Godfrey, if we were to give half our fortune to the poor—if we were to make some great sacrifice—do you think God would spare us such pangs as these—the fear—the horrible fear of being parted from each other?"

"My dearest, we cannot make a bargain with Providence. We can only do our duty, and hope for the best."

"At any rate, let us be very—very good to the poor," urged Juanita, with intense earnestness; "let us have their prayers to plead for us."

The night was warm and still, and the windows were all open to the terrace. Godfrey and Juanita took their coffee in their favourite corner by the magnolia tree, and sat there for a long time in the soft light of the stars, talking the old sweet talk of their future life.

"We must drive to Swanage and see Lady Jane to-morrow," said Juanita by-and-by. "Don't you think it was very wrong to go to see my people—only cousins after all—before we went to your mother?"

"She will come to us, dear, directly we give her permission. I know she is dying to see you in your new character."

"How lovely she looked at the wedding, in her pale grey gown and bonnet. I love her almost as well as I love my own dear, good, indulgent mother, and I think she is the most perfect lady I ever met."

"I don't think you'll find her very much like the typical mother-in-law, at any rate," replied Godfrey, gaily.

They decided on driving to Swanage next morning. They would go in the landau, and bring "the mother" back with them for a day or two, if she could be persuaded to come.

Juanita stifled a yawn presently, and seemed somewhat languid after her sleepless night and long day of talk and vivacity.

"I am getting very stupid company," she said. "I'll go to bed early to-night, Godfrey, and leave you an hour's quiet with 'Wider Horizons.' I know you are longing to go on with that book, but your chatterbox wife won't let you."

Of course he protested that her society was worth more than all

the books in the British Museum. He offered to take his book up to her room and read her to sleep, if she liked; but she would not have it so.

"You shall have your own quiet corner and your books, just as if you were still a bachelor," she said, caressingly, as she hung upon his shoulder for a good-night kiss. "As for me, I am utterly tired out. Janet and Sophy talked me to death; and then there was the long drive home. I shall be as fresh as ever to-morrow morning, and ready to be off to dear Lady Jane."

He went into the hall with her, and to the top of the stairs for the privilege of carrying her candlestick, and he only left her at the end of the corridor out of which her room opened.

She did not ring for her maid, preferring solitude to that young person's attendance. She did not want to be worried with elaborate hair-brushing or ceremonies of any kind. She was thoroughly exhausted with the alternations of emotion of which her life had been made up of late, and she fell asleep almost as soon as her head touched her pillow.

The bedroom was over the drawing-room. Her last look from the open casement had shown her the reflection of the lights below on the terrace. She was near enough to have spoken out of the window to her husband, had she been so minded. She could picture him sitting at the table at the corner window, in his thoughtful attitude, his head bent over his book, one knee drawn up nearly to his chin, one arm hanging loosely across the arm of his low easy-chair. She had watched him thus many a time, completely absorbed in his book.

She slept as tranquilly as an infant, and her dream-wanderings were all in pleasant places—with him, always with him; confused after the manner of all dreams, but with no sign of trouble.

What was this dream about being with him at Woolwich where they were firing a big gun? A curious dream! She had been there once with her father to see a gun drawn—but she had never seen one fired there,—and now in her dream she stood in a crowd of strange faces, fronting the river, and there was a long grey iron-clad on the water—a turret ship—and there came a flash, and then a puff of white smoke, and the report of a gun, short and sharp, not like the roar of a cannon by any means, and yet her dream showed her the dark sullen gun on the grey deck, the biggest gun she had ever seen.

She started up from her pillow, cold and trembling. That report of the gun had seemed so real and so near, that it had awakened her. She was wide awake now, and pushed back her loose hair from her eyes, and felt under her pillow for her watch, and looked at it in the dim light of the night-lamp on the table by her bed.

"A quarter to one."

She had left the drawing-room a few minutes after ten. It was

long for Godfrey to have sat reading alone; but he was insatiable when he had a new book that interested him.

She got up and put on her slippers and dressing-gown, prepared to take him to task for his late hours. She was not alarmed by her dream, but the sound of that sharp report was still in her ears as she lighted her candle and went down into the silent house.

She opened the drawing-room door, and looked across to the spot where she expected to see her husband sitting. His chair was empty. The lamp was burning just as she had left it hours ago, burning with a steady light under the green porcelain shade, but he was not there.

Puzzled, and with a touch of fear, she went slowly across the room towards his chair. He had strayed out on to the terrace perhaps—he had gone out for a final smoke. She would steal after him in her long white gown, and frighten him if she could.

"He ought at least to take me for a ghost," she thought.

She stopped transfixed with a sudden horror. He was lying on the carpet at her feet in a huddled heap, just as he had rolled out of his chair. His head was bent forward between his shoulders, his face was hidden. She tried to lift his head, hanging over him, calling to him in passionate entreaty; and, behold, her hands and arms were drowned in blood. His blood splashed her white peignoir. It was all over her. She seemed to be steeped in it, as she sat on the floor trying to get a look at his face—to see if his wound was mortal.

For some moments she had no other thought than to sit there in her horror, repeating his name in every accent of terror and of love, beseeching him to answer her. Then gradually came the conviction of his unconsciousness, and of the need of help. He was badly hurt—dangerously hurt—but it might not be mortal. Help must be got. He must be cured somehow. She could not believe that he was to die.

She rushed to the bell and rang again, and again, and again, hardly taking her finger from the little ivory knob, listening as the shrill electric peal vibrated through the silent house. It seemed an age before there was any response, and then three servants came hurrying in—the butler, and one of the footmen, and a scared housemaid. They saw her standing there, tall and white, dabbled with blood.

"Some one has been trying to murder him," she cried. "Didn't you hear a gun?"

No, no one had heard anything till they heard the bell. The two men lifted Sir Godfrey from the floor to the sofa, and did all they could do to staunch that deadly wound in his neck, from which the blood was still pouring—a bullet wound. Lambert, the butler, was afraid that the bullet had pierced the jugular vein.

If there was life still, it was only ebbing life. Juanita flung her-

self on the ground beside that prostrate form and kissed the unconscious lips, and the cold brow, and those pallid cheeks; kissed and cried over him, and repeated again and again that the wound was not mortal.

"Is any one going for the doctor?" she cried, frantically. "Are you all going to stand still and see him die?"

Lambert assured her that Thomas was gone to the stable to wake the men, and despatch a mounted messenger for Mr. Dolby, the family doctor.

"He might have helped us more if he had run there himself," cried Juanita. "There will be time lost in waking the men, and saddling a horse. I could go there faster."

She looked at the door as if she had half resolved to rush off to the village in her dressing-gown and slippers. And then she looked again at that marble face, and again fell upon her knees by the sofa, and laid her cheek against that bloodless cheek, and moaned and cried over him; while the butler went to get brandy, with but little hope in his own mind of any useful result.

"What an end to a honeymoon!" he said to himself despondently.

CHAPTER VI.

"Is not short payne well borne that bringes long ease,
And layes the soule to sleepe in quiet grave?
Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,
Ease after warre, death after life . . . ."

The morning dawned upon a weeping household. There was nothing to be done when Mr. Dolby, the village surgeon, arrived at Cheriton House. He could only examine the death-wound and express his opinion as to its character.

"It was certainly not self-inflicted," he told the servants, as they stood about him in a stony group.

"Self-inflicted, indeed!" echoed Lambert, "I should think not. If ever there was a young man who had cause to set store by his life it was Sir Godfrey Carmichael. It's murder, Mr. Dolby, rank murder."

"Yes, I'm afraid it's murder," said Dolby, with an air which implied that suicide would have been a bagatelle in comparison.

"But who can have done it, and why?" he asked after a pause.

The servants inclined to the opinion that it was the act of a poacher. Lord Cheriton had always been what they called a mark upon poachers. There was doubtless a vendetta to which the

pheasant-snaring fraternity had pledged themselves, and Sir Godfrey was the victim of that vendetta; however strange it might appear that hatred of Lord Cheriton should find its expression in the murder of Lord Cheriton's son-in-law.

"We must wait for the inquest before we can know anything," said Dolby, when he had done all that surgery could do for that cold clay, which was to compose the lifeless form in its final rest in a spare bedroom at the end of the corridor, remote from that bridal chamber where Juanita was lying motionless in her dumb despair.

The local policeman was on the scene at seven o'clock, prowling about the house with a countenance of solemn stolidity, and asking questions which seemed to have very little direct bearing on the case, and taking measurements between the spot where the murdered man had been found, too plainly marked by the pool of blood which had soaked into the velvet pile, and imaginary points upon the terrace outside, with the doctor at his elbow to make suggestions, and as far as in him lay behaving as a skilled London detective might have behaved under the same circumstances, which conduct on his part did not prevent Mr. Dolby telegraphing to Scotland Yard as soon as the wires were at his disposal.

He was in the village post-office when the clock struck eight, and the post-mistress, who had hung out a flag and decorated her shop front with garlands on the wedding day, was watching him with an awe-stricken countenance as he wrote his telegrams.

The first was to Scotland Yard:—

"Sir Godfrey Carmichael murdered late last night. Send one of your most trustworthy men to investigate."

The second was to Lord Cheriton, Grand Hotel, Paramé St. Malo, France:—

"Sir Godfrey Carmichael was murdered last night, between twelve and one o'clock. Murderer unknown. Death instantaneous. Pray come immediately."

The third was to Matthew Dalbrook, more briefly announcing the murder.

He was going to send a fourth message to Lady Jane Carmichael, began to write her address, then thought better of it, and tore up the form.

"I'll drive over and tell her," he said to himself. "Poor soul, it will break her heart, let her learn it how she may. But it would be cruel to telegraph, all the same."

Every one at Cheriton knew that Lady Jane's affections were centred upon her only son. She had daughters, and she was very fond of them. They were both married, and had married well; but their homes lay far off, one in the Midlands, the other in the North of England, and although in each case there was a nursery full of grandchildren, neither the young married women nor the babies had ever filled Lady Jane's heart as her son had filled it.

And now Mr. Dolby had taken upon himself to go and tell this gentle widow that the light of her life was extinguished; that the son she adored had been brutally and inexplicably murdered. It was a hard thing for any man to do; and Mr. Dolby was a warm-hearted man, with home ties of his own.

Before Mr. Dolby's gig was halfway to Swanage, his telegram had been delivered at Dorchester, and Matthew Dalbrook and his son were starting for Cheriton with a pair of horses in the solicitor's neat T cart, which was usually driven with one. Theodore drove, and father and son sat side by side in a dreary silence.

What could be said? The telegram told so little. They had speculated and wondered about it in brief broken sentences as they stood in the office fronting the sunny street, waiting for the carriage. They had asked each other if this ghastly thing could be; if it were not some mad metamorphose of words, some blunder of a telegraph clerk's, rather than a horrible reality.

Murdered—a man who had been sitting at their table, full of life and spirits, in the glow of youth, and health, and happiness, less than twenty-four hours ago! Murdered—a man who had never known what it was to have an enemy, who had been popular with all classes! Had been! How awful to think of him as belonging to the past, he who yesterday looked forward to so radiant a future! And Theodore Dalbrook had envied him, as even the most generous of men must needs envy the winner in the race for love.

Could it be? Or if it were really true, how could it be? What manner of murderer? What motive for the murder? Where had it happened? On the highway—in the woody labyrinths of the Chase? And upon the mind of Theodore flashed the same idea which had suggested itself to the servants. It might be the work of a poacher whom Sir Godfrey had surprised during a late ramble. Yet a poacher must be hard bested before he resorts to murder, and Sir Godfrey—easy tempered and generous—was hardly the kind of man to take upon himself the functions of a gamekeeper, and give chase to any casual depredator. It was useless to wonder or to argue while the facts of the case were all unrevealed. It would be time to do that when they were at Cheriton. So the father and son sat in a dismal silence, save that now and again the elder man sighed, "Poor Juanita, my poor Juanita; and she was so happy yesterday."

Theodore winced at the words. Yes, she had been so happy, and he had despaired because of her happiness. The cup of gladness which had brimmed over for her had been to him a fountain of bitterness. It seemed to him as if he had never realized how fondly he loved her till he saw her by her husband's side, an embodiment of life's sunshine, innocently revealing her felicity in every look and word. It was so long since he had ceased to hope. He had even taught himself to think he was resigned to his fate,

that he could live his life without her. But that delusion ceased yesterday, and he knew that she was dearer than she had ever been to him now that she was irrevocably lost. It was human nature, perhaps, to love her best when love was most hopeless.

They drove along the level road towards Cheriton, in the dewy freshness of the summer morning, by meadow and copse, by heath and cornfield, the skylarks carolling in the hot blue sky, the corncrake creaking inside the hedge, the chaffinch reiterating his monotonous note, the jay screaming in the wood, all living creatures revelling in the cloudless summer. It was hard, awful, unsupportable, that he who was with them yesterday, who had driven along this road under the westering sun, was now cold clay, a subject for the coroner, a something to be hidden away in the family vault, and forgotten as soon as possible; for what does consolation mean except persuasion to forget?

Never had the way between Dorchester and Cheriton Chase looked lovelier than in this morning atmosphere; never had the cattle grouped themselves into more delightful pictures amidst those shallow waters which reflected the sky; never had the lights and shadows been fairer upon those level meadows and yonder broken hills. Theodore Dalbrook loved every bit of that familiar landscape; and even to-day, amidst the horror and wonder of his distracted thoughts, he had a dim sense of surrounding beauty, as of something seen in a dream. He could have hardly told where he was, or what the season was, or whether it was the morning or the evening light that was gilding the fields yonder.

The lowered blinds at Cheriton told only too surely that the ghastly announcement in the telegram was no clerical error. The face of the footman who opened the door was pale with distress. He conducted Mr. Dalbrook and his son to the library, where the butler appeared almost immediately to answer the elder man's eager questions.

Not on the highway, not in the woods or the Park, but in the drawing-room where the butler had seen him sitting in a low armchair by the open window, in the tranquil summer night, absorbed in his book.

"He was that wrapped up that I don't believe he knew I was in the room, sir," said Lambert, "till I asked him if there was anything further wanted for the night, and then he starts, looks up at me with his pleasant smile, and answers in his quiet friendly way, 'Nothing more, thank you, Lambert. Is it very late?' I told him it was past eleven, and I asked if I should shut the drawing-room shutters before I went to bed, but he says, 'No, I'll see to that—I like the windows open,' and then he went on reading, and less than two hours afterwards he was lying on the ground, in front of the window—dead."

"Have you any suspicion, Lambert, as to the murderer?"

"Well, no, sir; not unless it was a poacher or an escaped lunatic.

"The lunatic seems rather the more probable conjecture," said Matthew Dalbrook. "The police are at work already, I hope."

"Well, sir, yes; our local police are doing all that lies in their power, and I have done what I could to assist them. Mr. Dolby wired to Scotland Yard at the same time as he wired to you."

"That was wisely done. Have there been no traces of the murderer discovered? No indication of any kind?"

"Nothing, sir; but one of the under housemaids remembers to have heard footsteps about on the terrace, after dark, on several occasions within the last fortnight; once while Sir Godfrey and our young lady were at dinner, and two or three times at a later hour when they were in the drawing-room or the library."

"Did she see any one?"

"No, sir; she is rather a dull kind of girl, and never so much as troubled to find out what the footsteps meant. Her bedroom is one of the old attics on the south side of the house, and she was sitting at work near her open window when she heard the footsteps —going and coming—slow and stealthy-like—upon the terrace at intervals. She is sure they were not her ladyship's nor Sir Godfrey's steps on e'ther occasion. She says she knows their walk, and she would swear to these footsteps as altogether different. Slower, more creeping-like, as she put it."

"Has no one been seen lurking about after dark?"

"No one, sir, as we have heard of; and the constable questioned all the servants, pretty close, I can tell you. He hasn't left much for the London detective to do."

Matthew Dalbrook had been the only questioner in this interrogatory. Theodore had sunk into a chair on entering the room, and sat silent, with a face of marble. He was thinking of the stricken girl whose life had been desolated by this mysterious crime. His father had not forgotten her; but he had wanted, first of all, to learn all he could about her husband's death.

"How does Lady Carmichael bear it?" he asked presently.

"Very sadly, sir; very sadly. Mrs. Morley and Celestine are both with her. Mr. Dolby ordered that she should be kept as quiet as possible, not allowed to leave her room if they could help it, but it has been very difficult to keep her quiet. Poor dear young lady; She wanted to go to *him*."

"Poor girl! poor girl! So happy yesterday!" said Matthew Dalbrook.

His son sat silent, as if he were made of stone.

Far, very far off, as it were at the end of a long dark vista, cut sharply across an impenetrable wood of choking thorns and blinding briars, he saw Juanita again radiant, again happy, again loving and beloved, and on the threshold of another life. The vision dazzled him, almost to blindness. But could it ever be? Could that loving

heart ever forget this agony of to-day—ever beat again to a joyful measure? He wrenched himself from that selfish reverie; he felt a wretch for having yielded up his imagination, even for a moment, to that alluring vision. He was here to mourn with her, here to pity her—to sympathize with this unspeakable grief. Murdered! Her lover-husband shot to death by an unknown hand, her honeymoon ended with one murderous flash—that honeymoon which had seemed the prelude to a lifetime of love.

"I should like to see her," said Mr. Dalbrook. "I think it would be a comfort to her to see me, however agitated she may be. Will you take my name to the housekeeper, and ask her opinion?"

Lambert looked doubtful as to the wisdom of the course, but was ready to obey all the same.

"Mr. Dolby said she was to be kept very quiet, sir—that she wasn't to see anybody."

"That would hardly apply to her own people. Mr. Dolby telegraphed for me."

"Did he, sir? Then I conclude he would not object to her ladyship seeing you. I'll send up your name. Perhaps, while the message is being taken, you would like to have a look at the spot where it happened?"

"Yes. I want to know all that can be known."

Lambert had been so busy with the constable all the morning that he felt himself almost on a level with Scotland Yard talent, and he took a morbid interest in that dark stain on the delicate half tints of the velvet pile, and in such few details as he was able to expound. He despatched a footman upstairs, and he led the Dalbrooks to the drawing-room, where he open the shutters of that window through which the assassin must have aimed, and let a flood of sunshine into the darkened room.

The chair, the table, and lamp stood exactly as they had stood last night. Lambert took credit to himself for not having allowed them to be moved by so much as an inch.

"Any assistance in my power I shall be only too happy to give to the London detective," he said. "Of course, coming on the scene as a total stranger, he can't be expected to do much without help."

There was no need to point out that ghastly stain upon the carpet. The shaft of noonday sunshine seemed to concentrate its brightness on that grisly patch. Dark, dark, dark with the witness of a cruel murder—the murder of a man who had never done an unkindly act, or harboured an unworthy thought.

Theodore Dalbrook stood looking at that stain. It seemed to bring the fatal reality nearer to him. He looked at the low chair with its covering of peacock plush, and its Turkish embroidery draped daintily across the broad back and capacious arms—a chair to live in—a sybarite's estate,—and then at the satinwood book-table filled with such books as the lounger loves—Southey's "Doctor."

"Burton," "Table Talk," by Coleridge, Whateley, Rogers, "The Sentimental Journey," "Rochefoucauld," "Caxtoniana," "Elia," and thrown carelessly upon one of the shelves a handkerchief of cobweb cambric, with a monogram that occupied a third of the fabric, "J.C." Her handkerchief, dropped there last night, as she arranged the books for her husband's use—putting her own favourites in his way.

Lambert took up a book and opened it with a dismal smile, handing it to Mr. Dalbrook as he did so.

It was "Wider Horizons," the volume he had been reading when the bullet struck him, and those open pages were spattered with his blood.

"Put it away for God's sake, man," cried Dalbrook, horrified. "Whatever you do, don't let Lady Carmichael see it.'

"No, sir, better not, perhaps, sir—but it's evidence, and it ought to be produced at the inquest."

"Produce it if you like; but there is evidence enough to show that he was murdered on this spot."

"As he sat reading, sir; the book is a great point."

And then Lambert expounded the position of that lifeless form, making much of every detail, as he had done to the constable.

While he was talking, the door was opened suddenly, and Juanita rushed into the room.

"Lord have mercy on us, she mustn't see that," cried Lambert, pointing to the carpet.

Matthew Dalbrook hurried forward to meet her, and caught her in his arms before she could reach that fatal spot. He held her there, looking at her with pitying eyes, while Theodore approached slowly, silently, agonized by the sight of her agony. The change from the joyous self-abandonment of yesterday to the rigid horror of to-day was the most appalling transformation that he had ever looked upon. Her face was of a livid pallor, her large dark eyes were distended and fixed, and all their brilliancy was quenched like a light blown out. Her blanched lips trembled as she tried to speak, and it was after several futile efforts to express her meaning that she finally succeeded in shaping a sentence distinctly.

"Have they found his murderer?"

"Not yet, dearest. It is far too soon to hope for that. But it is not for you to think about that, Juanita. All will be done—be sure—rest secure in the devotion of those who love you; and——" with a break in his voice, "who loved him."

She lifted her head quickly, with an angry light in the eyes which had been so dull till that moment.

"Do you think I will leave that work to others?" she said. "It is my business. It is all that God has left me to do in this world. It is my business to see that his murderer suffers,—not as I suffer—that can never be,—but all that the law can do—the law which is so

merciful to murderers nowadays. You don't think he can get off lightly, do you, uncle? They will hang him, won't they? Hang him—hang him—hang him," she repeated, in hoarse dull syllables. "A few moments' agony after a night of terror. So little—so little! And I have to live my desolate life. My punishment is for a lifetime."

"My love, God will be good to you. He can lighten all burdens," murmured Mr. Dalbrook, gently.

"He cannot lighten mine, not by the weight of a single hair. He has stretched forth His hand against me in hatred and anger, perhaps because I loved His creature better than I loved Him."

"My dearest, this is madness——"

"I did, I did," she reiterated. "I loved my husband better than I loved my God. I would have worshipped Satan if I could have saved him by Satan's help. I loved him with all my heart, and mind, and strength, as we are taught to love God. There was not room in my heart for any other religion. He was the beginning and the end of my creed. And God saw my happy love and hated me for it. He is a jealous God. We are taught that when we are little children. He is a jealous God, and He put it into the head of some distracted creature to come to that window and shoot my husband."

A violent fit of hysteria followed these wild words. Matthew Dalbrook felt that all attempts at consolation must needs be vain for some time to come. Until this tempest of grief was calmed nothing could be done.

"She will have her mother here in a day or two," said Theodore. "That may bring some comfort."

Juanita heard him even in the midst of her hysterical sobbing. Her hearing was abnormally keen.

"No one, no one can comfort me, unless they can give me back my dead."

She started up suddenly from the sofa where Matthew had placed her, and grasped his arm with convulsive force.

"Take me to him," she entreated, "take me to him, uncle. You were always kind to me. They won't let me go to him. It is brutal, it is infamous of them. I have a right to be there."

"By-and-by, my dear girl, when you are calmer."

"I will be calm this instant if you will take me to him," she said, commanding herself at once, with a tremendous effort, choking down those rising sobs, clasping her convulsed throat with constraining hands, tightening her tremulous lips.

"See," she said, "I am quite calm now. I will not give way again. Take me to him. Let me see him—that I may be sure my happy life was not all a dream—a mad-woman's dream—as it seems to have been now, when I cannot look upon his face."

Mr. Dalbrook looked at his son interrogatively.

"Let her see him," said Theodore, gently. "We cannot lessen

her sorrow. It must have its way. Better perhaps that she should see him, and accustom herself to her grief; better for her brain, however it may torture her heart."

He saw the risk of a further calamity in his cousin's state—the fear that her mind would succumb under the burden of her sorrow. It seemed to him that there was more danger in thwarting her natural desire to look upon her beloved dead than in letting her have her way.

The housekeeper had followed her young mistress to the drawing-room door, and was waiting there. She shook her head, and murmured something about Mr. Dolby's orders, but submitted to the authority of a kinsman and family solicitor, as even superior to the faculty.

She led the way silently to that upper chamber where the murdered man was lying. Matthew Dalbrook put his cousin's icy hand through his arm and supported her steps as they slowly followed. Theodore remained in the drawing-room, walking up and down, in deepest thought, stopping now and then in his slow pacing to and fro to contemplate that stain upon the velvet pile, and the empty chair beside it.

In the room above Juanita knelt beside the bed where he who kissed her last night on the threshold of her chamber lay in his last slumber, a marble figure with calm dead face shrouded by the snowy sheet, with flowers—white waxen exotics—scattered about the bed. She lifted the sheet, and looked upon him, and kissed him with love's last despairing kiss, and then she knelt beside the bed, with her face bent in her clasped hands, calmer than she had been at any moment since she found her murdered husband lying at her feet.

"It's wonderful," whispered the housekeeper to Mr. Dalbrook; "it seems to have soothed her, poor dear, to see him—and I was afraid she would have broke down worse than ever."

"You must give way to her a little, Mrs. Morley. She has a powerful mind, and she must not be treated like a child. She will live through her trouble, and rise superior to it, be sure of that; terrible as it is."

The door opened softly, and a woman came into the room, a woman of about five-and-forty, of middle height, slim and delicately made, with aquiline nose and fair complexion, and flaxen hair just touched with grey. She was deadly pale, but her eyes were tearless, and she came quietly to the bed, and fell on her knees by Juanita's side and hid her face as Juanita's was hidden, and the first sound that came from her lips was a long low moan—a sound of greater agony than Matthew Dalbrook had ever heard in his life until that moment.

"Good God," he muttered to himself, as he moved to a distant window, "I had forgotten Lady Jane."

It was Lady Jane, the gentle soul who had loved that poor clay

with a love that had grown and strengthened with every year of his life, with a love that had won liberal response from the recipient. There had never been a cloud between them, never one moment of disagreement or doubt. Each had been secure in the certainty of the other's affection. It had been a union such as is not often seen between mother and son; and it was ended—ended by the red hand of murder.

Matthew Dalbrook left the room in silence, beckoning to the housekeeper to follow him.

"Leave them together," he said. "They will be more comfort to each other than any one else in the world can be to either of them. Keep in the way—here, in the corridor, in case of anything going wrong—fainting, or hysterics, for instance,—but so long as they are tolerably calm let them be together, and undisturbed."

He went back to his son, and they both left the house soon afterwards and drove off to find the Coroner and to confer with him. Later in the afternoon they saw the local policeman, whose discoveries, though he evidently thought them important, Mr. Dalbrook considered *nil*.

He had found out that a certain village freebooter—ostensibly an agricultural labourer, nocturnally a poacher—bore a grudge against Lord Cheriton, and had sworn to be even with him sooner or later. The constable opined that, being an ignorant man, this person might have mistaken Lord Cheriton's son-in-law for Lord Cheriton himself.

He had discovered, in the second place, that two vans of gipsies had encamped just outside the Chase on the night after the arrival of the bridal pair. They were, in fact, the very gipsies who had provided Aunt Sally and the French shooting-gallery for the amusement of the populace, and he opined that some of these gipsies were "in it."

Why they should be in it he did not take upon himself to explain, but he declared that his experience of the tribe justified his suspicions. He was also of opinion that the murderer had come with the intent to plunder the drawing-room, which was, in his own expression, "chock-full of valuables," and that, being disappointed, and furthermore detected, in that intent, he had tried to make all things safe by a casual murder.

"But, man alive, Sir Godfrey was sitting in his arm-chair, absorbed in his book. There was nothing to prevent any intending burglar sneaking away unseen. You must find some better scent than that if you mean to track the murderer."

"I hope, sir, with my experience of the district, I shall have a better chance of finding him than a stranger imported from the Metropolis," said Constable Barber, severely. "I conclude there will be a reward offered, Mr. Dalbrook?"

"There will, and a large one. I must not take upon myself to name the figure. Lord Cheriton will be here to-morrow or next

day, and he will, no doubt, take immediate steps. You may consider yourself a very lucky man, Barber, if you can solve this mystery."

Matthew Dalbrook turned from the eager face of the police-officer with a short, angry sigh. It was of the reward the man was thinking, no doubt—congratulating himself perhaps upon the good luck which had thrown such a murder in his way. And presently the man from Scotland Yard would be on the scene, keen and business-like, yet full of a sportsman's ardour, intent on discovery, as on a game in which the stakes were worth winning. Little cared either of these for the one fair life cut short, for the other young life blighted.

CHAPTER VII.

"I saw a Fury whetting a death-dart."

Lord Cheriton liked to take his summer holiday on a sunny seashore where there were not many English visitors. Paramé St. Malo fulfilled both these conditions. It afforded him a vast expanse of golden sands, firm beneath his foot, steeped in sunshine for the most part, on which to pace to and fro, lifting his eyes dreamily now and then to the sea-girt city, with its stony rampart, and its quaint Louis Quatorze mansions, facing the sea in the sober dignity of massive stone façade and tall windows; grey old houses, which seem too good for the age in which they find themselves, solid enough to last through long centuries, and to outlive all that yet lingers of that grandiose France in which they were built. Roof above roof rises the Breton city, steep old streets leading up to Cathedral and Municipal Palace, with the crocketed steeple for its pinnacle, shining with a pale brilliance in the summer sunlight, verdureless, and with but little colour save the reflected glory of the skies, and the jasper green of the sea in its ring of golden sand.

Lord Cheriton affected Paramé because, though it was within a summer night's journey from his own Isle of Purbeck, it was thoroughly out of the beaten track, and he was tolerably secure from those hourly encounters with his most particular friends, to which he must have submitted at Baden or Spa, at Trouville or Dieppe. Paramé was Parisian or nothing. The smart people all came from Paris. English smartness had its centre at Dinard, and the English who patronize Dinard will tell you there is no other paradise on earth, and that its winter climate is better than that of the Riviera, if people would only have faith. So long as the Cheritons could keep out of the way of exploring friends from Dinard, his Lordship

was exempt from the amusements which to some minds make life intolerable.

Lady Cheriton was distinctly social in her instincts, and looked Dinard-wards sometimes from her lotus-land with a longing eye. She would have liked to ask some nice people to luncheon; and she knew so many nice people at Dinard. She would have liked to organize excursions to Mont St. Michel, or up the Rance to Dinan. She would have liked to plunge into all manner of innocent gaieties; but her husband stamped out these genial yearnings.

"It seems such a pity not to have people over to dinner when there are such nice operettas and vaudevilles every night at the Casino," she sighed.

"And if you had them over to dinner, how do you suppose they would get back?" asked her husband, sternly. "Would you wish to keep them all till next morning, and be bored with them at breakfast?"

That intervening strip of sea, narrow as it was, afforded unspeakable comfort to Lord Cheriton. It was an excuse for refusing to go over and take afternoon tea with people he was supposed to hold in his heart of hearts in the way of friendship.

"You can go, Maria, if you like," he told his wife; "but I am not a good sailor, and I came here on purpose to be quiet."

This was his Lordship's answer to every hospitable suggestion. He had come to Paramé for rest; and not for gadding about, or entertainments of any kind.

So the long summer days succeeded each other in a lazy monotony, and whatever gaiety there might be in the great white hotel, the English law-lord and his wife had no share in it. They occupied a suite of light, airy rooms in the west pavilion, and were served apart from the vulgar herd, after the fashion which befitted a person of Lord Cheriton's distinction. They had only their body servants, man and maid, so they were waited upon by the servants of the hotel, and they drove about the dusty, level roads between St. Servans and Dol in a hired landau, driven by a Breton coachman. Lady Cheriton was dull, but contented. She had always submitted to her husband's pleasure. He had been a very indulgent husband in essentials, and he had made her a peeress. Her married life had been eminently satisfactory; and she could afford to endure one summer month of monotony amidst pleasant surroundings. She dropped in at the Casino every evening, while Lord Cheriton read the papers in the seclusion of his salon—with the large French window wide open to the blue sea, and the blue moonlight—hearing the tramp of feet on the terrace, or the sea wall beyond, or now and again strains of lively music from the theatre, where the little opera company from Paris were singing Lecocq's joyous music.

People used to turn round to look at Lady Cheriton as she walked gravely between the rows of seats to her place near the

orchestra, his Lordship's valet following with an extra shawl, an opera-glass, and a footstool. He established her in her chair, and then retired discreetly to the back of the theatre to await her departure, and to escort her safely back to the hotel. He was a large, serious-looking man, a French Swiss, who had lived ten years in Italy, and over fifteen years in Lord Cheriton's service, and who spoke French, Italian, German, and English indifferently.

Lady Cheriton was handsome still, with a grand Spanish beauty which time had touched lightly. She was tall and dignified in carriage, though a shade stouter than she could have wished, and she dressed to perfection with sobriety of colouring and richness of material. Her life had been full of pleasantness, her only sorrow being the loss of her infant sons, which she had not taken to heart so deeply as the proud father who had pined for an heir to his newly won honours. She had her daughter, her first-born, the child for whom her heart had first throbbed with the strange new love of maternity. She shed some natural tears for the boy-babies, and then she let Juanita fill their place in her heart, and her life again seemed complete in its sum of happiness. And now in this sleepy summer holiday—cut off from most things that she cared for—Juanita's letters had been her chief joy—those happy, innocent, girlish letters, overflowing with fond, foolish praise of the husband she loved, letters made up of nothings—of what he had said to her, and what she had said to him—and where they had taken afternoon tea—and of their morning ride, or their evening walk, and of those plans for the long future which they were always making, projecting their thoughts into the time to come, and laying out those after years as if they were a certainty.

There had been no fairer morning than that which followed the night of the murder. Lord Cheriton was an early riser at all seasons, most of all in the summer, when he was generally awake from five o'clock, and had to beguile an hour or so with one of the books on the table by his bed—a well-thumbed "Horace" or a duodecimo "Don Quixote," in ten volumes, which went everywhere with him. By seven o'clock he was dressed, and ready to begin the day; and between that hour and breakfast it was his habit to attend to the correspondence which had accumulated during the previous day. This severe rule was suspended, however, at Paramé, and he gave himself up to restful vacuity, strolling up and down the sands, or walking round the walls of St. Malo, or sauntering into the cathedral in a casual way for an early mass, enjoying the atmosphere of the place, with its old-world flavour.

On this particular morning he went no further than the sands, where he paced slowly to and fro in front of the long white terrace, hotel, and casino, heedless alike of Parisian idlesse coquetting with the crisp wavelets on the edge of the sea, and of the mounted officer yonder drilling his men upon the sandy flat towards St. Malo. He

was in a mood for idleness, but with him, idleness was only a synonym for deep thought. He was meditating upon his only child's future, and telling himself that he had done well for her.

Sir Godfrey Carmichael would be made Baron Cheriton in the days to come, when he, the first Baron, should be laid in the newly built vault in the cemetery outside Dorchester. He was not going to sever himself from his kindred in that last sleep, albeit they were common folk. He would lie under the Egyptian sarcophagus which he had set up in honour of his father, the crockery dealer, and his mother, the busy, anxious house-wife. The sarcophagus was plain and unpretentious, hardly too good for the shopkeeper; yet with a certain solid dignity which was not unbefitting the law-lord, almost as massive as that mammoth cross which marks the resting-place of Henry Brougham in the fair southern land. He had chosen the monument with uttermost care, so that it might serve the double purpose. He had looked at the broad blank panel many a time, wondering how his own name would look upon it, and whether his daughter would have a laurel wreath sculptured above it. It might be that admiring friends would suggest his being laid in the Abbey, hard by those shabby disused courts where he had pleaded and sat in judgment through so many laborious years; and it might be that the suggestion would be accepted by Dean and Chapter, and that the panel on the Dorchester sarcophagus would remain blank. James Dalbrook knew that he had deserved well of posterity, and, above all, of the ruling powers. He had been staunch and unwavering in his adherence to his own party, and he knew that he had a strong claim upon any Conservative Ministry. He had sounded those in authority, and he had been assured that there would be very little difficulty in getting Sir Godfrey Carmichael a peerage by-and-by, when he, Lord Cheriton, should be no more. Sir Godfrey's family was one of the oldest in the country, and he had but to deserve well of his party, when he had got his seat, to insure future favours. As the owner of the Cheriton and Milbrook estates, he would be a worthy candidate for one of those coronets which seem to be dealt round so freely by expiring Ministries, as it were a dying father dividing his treasures among his weeping children. So far as any man can think with satisfaction of the days when he shall be no more—and when this world will go on, badly, of course, but somehow, without him—Lord Cheriton thought of those far-off years when Godfrey Carmichael should be owner of Cheriton Chase. The young man had shown such fine qualities of heart and mind, and, above all, had given such unobtrusive evidence of his affection for Juanita's father, that the elder man must needs give measure for measure; therefore Godfrey had been to Lord Cheriton almost as a son. The union of his humbly born daughter with one of the oldest families in the south of England gratified the pride of the self-made man. His own pedigree might be of the lowliest; but his grandson

would be able to look back upon a long line of ancestors, glorified by many a patrician alliance. Strong and stern as was the fabric of James Dalbrook's mind, he was not superior to the Englishman's foible, and he loved rank and ancient lineage. He was a Tory to the core of his heart; and it was the earnestness and thoroughness of his convictions which had given him weight with his party. Wherever he spoke or whatever he wrote—and he had written much upon current politics in the *Saturday Review*, and the higher-class monthlies—bore the stamp of a Cromwellian vigour and a Cromwellian sincerity.

He had never felt more at ease than upon that balmy summer morning, pacing those golden sands in quiet meditation—brooding over Juanita's last letter received overnight—with its girlish raptures, its girlish dreams; picturing her in the near future as happy a mother as she was a bride, with his grandson, the third Baron Cheriton of the future, in her lap. He smiled at his own foolishness in thinking of that first boy-baby by the title which was but one of the possibilities of a foreshadowed sequence of events; yet he found himself repeating the words idly, to the rhythm of the wavelets that curled and sparkled near his feet—third Baron Cheriton, Godfrey Dalbrook Carmichael, third Baron Cheriton.

The cathedral clock was striking nine as he went into the hotel. The light breakfast of coffee and rolls was laid on a small round table near the window. Lady Cheriton was sitting in a recess between the massive stone columns which supported the balcony above, reading yesterday's *Morning Post* in her soft grey cashmere peignoir, whose flowing lines gave dignity to her figure. Her dark hair, as yet untouched by time, was arranged with an elegant simplicity. The fine old lace about her throat harmonized admirably with the pale olive of her complexion. She looked up at her husband with her placid smile, and gave him her hand in affectionate greeting.

"What a morning, James! One feels it a privilege to live. What a superb day it would be for Mont St. Michel!"

"A thirty-mile drive in the dust! Do you really think that it is the best use to which to put a summer day? You may be sure there will be plenty of worthy people of the same opinion, and that the rock will swarm with cheap tourists, and pretty little Madame Poulard will be put to the pin of her collar to feed them all."

She had seated herself at the table by this time, and was pouring out coffee with a leisurely air, smiling at her husband all the time, thinking him the greatest and wisest of men, even when he restrained her social instincts. She was never tired of looking at that massive face, with its clearly defined features, sharply cut jaw, and large grey eyes—dark and deep as the eyes of the earnest thinker rather than the shrewd observer. The strong projection of the lower brow

indicated keen perceptions, and the power of rapid judgment; but above the perceptive organs the upper brow towered majestically, giving the promise of a mind predominant in the regions of thought and imagination—such a brow as we look upon with reverence in the portraits of Walter Scott.

Intellectually the brow was equal to Scott's; morally there was something wanting. Neither benevolence nor veneration was on a par with the reasoning faculties. Tory principles with Lord Cheriton were not so much the result of an upward-looking nature as they were with Scott. This, at least, is the opinion at which a phrenologist might have arrived after a careful contemplation of that powerful brow.

Lord Cheriton sipped his coffee, and leaned back in his arm-chair, with his face to the morning sea. He sat in a lazy attitude, still thoughtful, with those pleasant thoughts which are the repose of the working man's brain.

The tide was going out; the rocky islets stood high out of the water; the sands were widening, till it seemed almost as if the sea were vanishing altogether from this beautiful bay.

"I suppose they will finish their honeymoon in a week or two, and move on to the Priory," said Lord Cheriton, by-and-by, revealing the subject of his reverie.

"Yes, Juanita says we may go home as early as the second week in August if we like. She is to be at the Priory in time to settle down before the shooting begins. They will have visitors in September—his sisters, don't you know—the Morningsides and the Grenvilles, and children and nurses—a house full. Lady Jane ought to be there to help her to entertain."

"I don't think Nita will want any help. She will be mistress of the situation, depend upon it, and would be if there were forty married sisters with their husbands and belongings. She seemed to be mistress of us all at Cheriton?"

"She is so clever," sighed the mother, remembering that Cheriton House would no longer be under that girlish sovereignty.

The grave looking French-Swiss valet appeared with a telegram on a salver.

"Who can have sent me a *petit bleue*?" exclaimed Lord Cheriton, who was accustomed to receive a good many of those little blue envelopes when he was in Paris, but expected no such communications at St. Malo.

Before leaving for his holiday he had impressed upon land steward and house steward that he was not to be bothered about anything.

"If there is anything wanted you will communicate with Messrs. Dalbrook," he said. "They have full powers."

And yet here was some worrying message—some question about a lease or an agreement, or somebody's rick had been burnt, or somebody's chimney had fallen through the roof. He opened the

little envelope with a vexed air, resentful of an unexpected annoyance. He read the message, and then sat blankly staring; read again, and rose from his seat suddenly with a cry of horror.

Never in his life had he experienced such a shock; never had those iron nerves, that heart, burned hard in the furnace of this world's strife, been so tried. He stood aghast, and could only give the little paper—with its type-printed syllables—to his scared wife, while he stood gazing at summer sky and summer sea in a blank helplessness, realizing dimly that something had happened which must change the whole course of the future, and overthrow every plan he had ever made.

"The third Baron Cheriton." Strange, but in that awful moment the words he had repeated idly on the sands half an hour ago echoed again in his ear.

Alas, he felt as if that title for which he had toiled was already extinct. He saw, as in a vision, the velvet cap and golden coronet upon the coffin lid, as the first and last Lord Cheriton was carried to his grave. That prophetic vision must needs be realized within a few years. There would be no one to succeed him.

Murdered! Why? By whom? What devil had been conjured out of hell to cut short that honest, stainless life? What had Godfrey Carmichael done that a murderer's hand should be raised against him?

Lady Cheriton's softer nature found relief in tears before the day was done; tears and agonized pacings up and down those rooms where life had been so placid in the sunlight—agonized supplications that God would take pity upon her widowed girl.

"So young, and so happy, and a widow—a widow before her nineteenth birthday," wailed the mother.

Lord Cheriton's grief was of a sterner kind, and found no outlet in words. He held a brief consultation with his valet, a soldierly looking man, who had fought under Garibaldi in Burgundy, when the guerilla captain made his brilliant endeavour to save sinking France. They looked at time-tables and calculated hours. The express to Paris would not arrive in time for the evening mail *viâ* Calais and Dover. It was Saturday. The cargo boat would cross to Southampton that night, and influence would obtain accommodation for his Lordship and party on board her. The valet took a fly and drove off to the quay to find the South-Western superintendent, and secure a private cabin for his master and mistress. They would have the boat to themselves, and would be at Southampton at seven o'clock next morning, and at Cheriton before noon, even if it were necessary to engage a special engine to take them there.

Lord Cheriton telegraphed to his daughter.

"Your mother and I will be with you to-morrow morning. Be brave for our sakes. Remember that you are all we have to live for."

Another telegram to the house-steward ordered a close carriage to be in attendance at Wareham Station at ten o'clock on Sunday morning.

"How quietly you bear it, James," his wife told Lord Cheriton, wonderingly, when the mode of their return had been arranged, and her maid was packing her trunks, with those soberly handsome gowns which had been the wonder of many a butterfly Parisienne.

She called him by his Christian name now as in their earliest years of wedded life. It was only on ceremonious occasions, and when the eye of society was upon her, that she addressed him by his title.

That stern quietude of his, the fine features set and rigid, frightened her more than a loquacious grief would have done. And yet she hardly knew whether he felt the calamity too much for words; or whether he did not feel it enough.

"Poor Godfrey," she sighed, "he was so good to me—all that a son could have been—murdered! My God! my God! how horrible. If it had been any other kind of death one might bear it—and yet that *he* should die at all would be too dreadful. So young, so handsome—cut off in the flower of his days! And she loved him so. She has loved him all her life. What will become of her without him?"

"What will become of her?" that was the mother's moaning cry all through that dreary day.

Lord Cheriton paced the sands as far as he could go from that giddy multitude in front of the sea wall—beyond the little rocky ridge by the pleasant Hôtel des Bains, where the young mothers, and nurses, and children, and homely, easy-going visitors congregate—away towards Cancale, where all was loneliness. He walked up and down, meditating upon his blighted hopes. He knew now that he had loved this young man almost as well as he loved his own daughter, and that his death had shattered as fair a fabric as ever ambition built on the further side of the grave.

"She will go in mourning for him all the days of my life, perhaps," he thought, "and then some day after I am in my grave she will fall in love with an adventurer, and the estate I love and the fortune I have saved will be squandered on the Turf or thrown away at Monte Carlo."

A grim smile curled his lip at a grim thought, as he paced that lonely shore beyond the jutting cliff and the villa on the point.

"I am sorry I left the Bench when I did," he thought; "it would have been something to have put on the black cap and passed sentence upon that poor lad's murderer."

Who was his murderer, and what the motive of the crime? Those were questions which Lord Cheriton had been asking himself with maddening iteration through that intolerable summer day. He welcomed the fading sunlight of late afternoon. He could eat

nothing; would not even sit down to make a pretence of dining; but waited chafing in the great stone hall of the hotel for the carriage that was to take him and his wife to the steamer.

CHAPTER VIII.

"The stars move still, Time runs, the clock will strike."

Trains were favourable, and there was no necessity for a special engine to carry Lord Cheriton and his wife to the house of mourning. It was not yet noon when the closed landau drove in at the chief gate of the park, not that side gate in the deep, rocky lane, of which Mrs. Porter was custodian. One of the gardeners lived at the lodge, and it was he who opened the gate this Sunday morning. Lord Cheriton stopped the carriage to question him. He had heard a full account of the murder already from the station-master at Wareham.

"Have they found the murderer?" he asked.

"No, my Lord; I'm afraid they're not likely to—begging your Lordship's pardon for venturing an opinion."

The man was an old servant, and altogether a superior person.

"Were the gates locked at the usual time on Friday night?"

"Yes, my Lord—the gates were locked, but that wouldn't keep out a foot-passenger. There's the turnstile in the lane."

"Of course. Yes, yes. A London detective has been at work, I hear."

"Yes, my Lord; came yesterday before two o'clock, and has been about with Barber ever since."

"And have they discovered nothing?"

"Nothing, my Lord—or if they have it has been kept dark."

Lord Cheriton asked no further questions. The man was right. A detective from Scotland Yard was not likely to talk about any minor discoveries that he might have made. Only the one grand discovery of the guilty man would have been made known.

Five minutes later the carriage drew up in front of the hall door. What a blank and melancholy look the fine old house had with all the windows darkened. It did not look so dismal as a London house with its level rows of windows and its flat façade would have looked under similar conditions; for here there was variety of mullion and moulding, bay-windows and oriel, dormer and lattice, and over all the growth of lovely creeping plants, starry clematis and passion-flower, clustering Banksia roses and waxen magnolia, an infinite beauty of form and colour. Yet the blind windows were

there, with their dull, dead look and chilling suggestion of death. Lady Cheriton looked at the house for a moment or so as she got out of the carriage, and then burst into tears. It seemed to her as if she had scarcely realized the stern reality till that moment.

She went straight to her daughter's boudoir, a room with an oriel window looking across the wide expanse of the park, where the turf lay openest to the sunshine, and where the deer were wont to congregate. The garden was at its narrowest point just below this window, and consisted only of a broad gravel path, and a strip of flowers at the top of a steep grass bank that sloped down to the ha-ha which divided garden and park. The room was full of Juanita's girlish treasures—evidencies of fancies that had passed like summer clouds—accomplishments begun and abandoned—a zither in one corner—a guitar and a mandolin against the wall—an easel in front of one window—a gigantic rush work-basket lined with amber satin and crammed with all manner of silks, wools, scraps, and unfinished undertakings in another. The room remained just as she had left it when she went to London at the beginning of May. She had not occupied it during her honeymoon; and perhaps that was the reason she was here now in her desolation, sitting silent, statue-like, with Lady Jane by her side, on a sofa opposite the oriel. She lifted her eyelids when her mother came into the room, and looked up at her in speechless despair. She uttered no word of greeting, but sat dumbly. Lady Cheriton went over to her, and knelt by her side, and then, feebly, automatically, the widowed girl put her limp, cold hand into her mother's and hid her bloodless face upon her mother's breast.

Lady Cheriton held her there with one hand while she stretched out her other hand to Lady Jane.

"Dear Lady Jane, how good of you to be with her—to comfort her."

"Where else should I be?—I want to be near him!"

The gentle blue eyes filled with tears, the gracious head trembled a little. Then came a long shivering sigh and silence.

The mother knelt beside the sofa with her child's head leaning forward upon her matronly bosom. There may have been some comfort perhaps in that contact, some recurrence of the thoughts and feelings of earlier years, when the mother could console every grief and soothe every pain. No words came to either of those mourners. What could be said in mitigation of a sorrow that seemed to offer no point of relief, no counter-balancing good. There was nothing to be done but to sit still and suffer.

The silence lasted long, and then Juanita lifted her head suddenly from its heavy repose and looked fixedly in her mother's face.

"My father has come back with you?" she asked.

"Yes, dearest. We did not lose an hour. Had there been any quicker way of travelling we would have been here sooner."

"My father will be able to find the murderer," said Juanita,

scarcely hearing her mother's words, intent upon her own thought. "A great lawyer as he was; a judge, too; he must be able to trace the murderer—to bring him to justice—to take a life for a life. Oh, God!" with a shrill agonizing cry, "could a thousand lives give me back one hour of that one life? Yet it will be something—something—to know that his murderer has been killed—killed shamefully, in cold blood, in the broad light of day. Oh, God, thou Avenger of wrong, make his last hours bitter to him, make his last moments hopeless; let him see the gates of hell opening before him when he stands trembling with the rope round his neck."

There was an intensity of hatred in this vindictive appeal, which thrilled the two listeners with an icy horror. It was like a blast from a frozen region blowing suddenly in their faces, and they shivered as they heard. Could it be the girl they knew, the loving, lovable girl, who, in those deep, harsh tones, called upon her God for vengeance and not for mercy?

"Oh, my love, my poor heart-broken love, pray to Him to have pity upon us; ask Him to teach us how to bow to the rod, how to bear His chastisement. That is the lesson we have to learn," pleaded Lady Jane, tearful and submissive, even in the depth of sorrow.

"Is it? *My* lesson is to see justice done upon the wretch who killed my husband—the malignant, the merciless devil. There was not one of those slayers of women and children in the Indian mutiny worse than the man who killed my love. What had *he* done—he, the kindest and best—generous, frank, pitiful to all who ever came in his way—what had *he* done to provoke any man's enmity? Oh, God, when I remember how good he was, and how much brighter and better the world was for having him——"

She began to pace the room, as she had paced it again and again in her slow hours of agony, her hands clasped above her dishevelled head, her great dark eyes—so dovelike in their hours of love and happiness—burning with an angry light, lurid almost, in the excitement of her fevered brain. There had been times when Lady Jane had feared that reason must give way altogether amidst this wild delirium of grief. She had stayed to watch, and to console, forgetting her own broken heart, putting aside all considerations of her own sorrow as something that might have its way afterwards, in order to comfort this passionate mourner.

Comfort, even from affection such as this, was unavailing. Now and again the girl turned her burning eyes upon the mother's pale, resigned face, and for a moment a thought of that chastened, gentle grief softened her.

"Dear, dear Lady Jane, God made you better than any other woman on this earth, I believe," she cried amidst her anguish. "The saints and martyrs must have been like you, but I am not. I am not made like that. I *cannot* kiss the rod."

The meeting between Juanita and her father was more painful to

him than to her. She hung upon his neck in feverish excitement, imploring him to avenge her husband.

"You can do it," she urged; "you who are so clever must know how to bring the murderer's guilt home to him. You will find him, will you not, father? He cannot have gone very far. He cannot have got out of the country yet. Think, it was only Friday. I was a happy woman upon Friday; only think of that—happy—sitting by Godfrey's side in the phaeton, driving through the sunset, and thinking how beautiful the world was and what a privilege it was to live. I had no more foreboding than the skylark had singing above our heads. And in less than an hour after midnight my darling was dead. Oh, God, how sudden! I cannot even remember his last words. He kissed me as he left me at my bedroom door—kissed me and said something. I cannot remember what it was; but I can hear the sound of his voice still—I shall hear it all my life."

Lord Cheriton let her ramble on. He had, alas, so little to say to her, such sorry comfort to offer. Only words, mere words—which must needs sound idle and hollow in the ear of grief, frame his consolatory speeches with what eloquence he might. He could do nothing for her, since he could not give her back her dead. This wild cry for vengeance shocked him from those young lips; yet it was natural perhaps. He too would give much to see the assassin suffer; he too felt that the dock and the gallows would be too trivial a punishment for that accursed deed.

He had looked upon the marble face of him who was to have been the second Baron Cheriton—looked upon it in its placid repose, and had sworn within himself to do all that ingenuity could do to avenge that cruel murder.

"He could not have had an enemy," he told himself, "unless it was some wretch who hated him for being happy and beloved."

He had a long talk with Mr. Luke Churton, the London detective, who had exhausted all his means without arriving at any satisfactory result.

"I confess, my Lord, that I am altogether at a standstill," said Mr. Churton, when he had related all that he had done since his arrival on the scene early on Saturday afternoon. "The utmost information I have been able to obtain leaves me without one definite idea. There is no one in the neighbourhood open to suspicion, so far as I can make out; for I am sure your Lordship will agree with me that your butler's notion of a poacher resenting your treatment by the murder of your son-in-law is much too thin. One cannot accept such a notion as that for a moment," said Mr. Churton, shaking his head.

"No, that is an untenable idea, no doubt."

"The next suggestion is that some person was prowling about with the intention of abstracting trinkets and other valuables from

the drawing-room—in an unguarded moment when the room might happen to be empty—and I admit that the present fashion of covering drawing-room tables and cabinets with valuables of every description is calculated to suggest plunder; but that kind of thing would be probable enough in London rather than in the country, and nothing is more unlikely than that a prowler of that order would resort to murder. Again, the manner in which the body was found, with the open book lying close to the hand that had held it, goes far to prove that Sir Godfrey was shot as he sat reading—and at a time when a burglar could have no motive for shooting him."

"Do you think it was the act of a lunatic?"

"No, my Lord, for in that event the murderer would have been heard of or found before now. The gardens, park, and chase have been most thoroughly searched under my superintendence. It is not possible for a lap-dog to be hidden anywhere within this demesne. The neighbouring villages—solitary cottages—commons and copses—have been also submitted to a searching investigation—the police all over the country are on the alert. Of course the crime is still of very recent date. Time to us seems longer than it really is."

"No doubt, no doubt! I can find no other hypothesis than that the act was done by a madman—such a motiveless murder—a man sitting by a window reading—shot by an unknown hand from a garden terrace—remote from the outer world. Were we in Ireland the crime might seem commonplace enough. Sir Godfrey was a landowner—and that alone is an offence against the idle and the lawless in that unhappy country,—but here, in the midst of an orderly, God-fearing population——"

"Had Sir Godfrey no enemy, do you think, my Lord?" asked the detective, gravely. "The crime has the look of a vendetta."

"There never was a young man, owner of a considerable estate, more universally beloved. His tenants adore him—for as a landlord he has been exceptionally indulgent."

"He may have granted too much in some quarters, and too little in others."

"No, no. He has been judicious in his liberality, and he has a capital bailiff, an old man who was a servant on this estate many years ago."

"But there are other influences," said the detective, musingly. "Whenever I meet with a crime of this kind—motiveless apparently—I remember the Eastern Prince—I think he was one of those long-headed Orientals, wasn't he, my Lord, who used to ask, 'Who is she?' In a thoroughly dark case I always suspect a woman behind the curtain. Sir Godfrey had been independent of all control for a good many years—and a young man of fortune, handsome, open-hearted, with only a mother to look after him—well, my Lord, *you* know the kind of thing that generally happens in such cases."

"You mean that my son-in-law may have been involved in some disreputable intrigue?"

"I don't say disreputable, my Lord; but I venture to suggest that there may have been some—ahem—some awkward entanglement—with a married woman, for instance,—and the husband—or another lover—may have belonged to the criminal classes. There are men who think very little of murder when they fancy themselves ill-used by a woman. Half the midnight brawls, and nearly half the murders, in the metropolis are caused by jealousy. I know what a large factor that is in the sum-total of crime, and unless you are sure there was no entanglement——"

"I am as sure as I can be of anything outside my own existence. I don't believe that Sir Godfrey ever cared for any woman in his life except my daughter."

"He might not have cared, my Lord, but he might have been drawn in," suggested Mr. Churton. "Young men are apt to be weak where women are concerned; and women know that, unfortunately, and they don't scruple to use their power; not the best of 'em even."

Young men are apt to be weak. Yes, Lord Cheriton had seen enough of the world to know that this was true. It was just possible that in that young life, which had seemed white as snow to the eye of kindred and friends, there had been one dark secret, one corroding stain, temptation yielded to, promises given—never to be fulfilled. Such things have been in many lives, in most lives, perhaps, could we know all, Lord Cheriton thought, as he sat silently meditating upon the detective's suggestions.

Lady Jane might know something about her son's past, perhaps, something that she might have kept locked in the beneficent maternal heart. He determined to sound her delicately at the earliest opportunity.

But on being sounded Lady Jane repudiated any such possibility. No, again and again no. His youth had been spotless; no hint of an intrigue had ever reached her from any quarter. He had chosen his friends among the most honourable young men at the University—his amusements had been such as became a young Englishman of exalted position—he had never stooped to low associations or even doubtful company; and from his boyhood upwards he had adored Juanita.

"That love alone would have kept him right," said Lady Jane; "but I do not believe that it was in his nature to go wrong."

It would seem, therefore, that the detective's suspicion was groundless. Jealousy could not have been the motive of the crime.

"If any of us could be sure that we know each other I ought to accept Lady Jane's estimate of her son," thought Lord Cheriton; "but there is always the possibility of an unrevealed nature—one phase in a character that has escaped discovery. I am almost in-

clined to think the detective may have hit upon the truth. There *must* have been a motive for this devilish act—unless it were done by a maniac."

The latter supposition seemed hardly probable. Lunacy wandering loose about the country would have betrayed itself before now.

It was past five upon that summer afternoon, and Lord Cheriton, having seen his daughter and interviewed the detective, was sauntering idly about the gardens in the blank hours before dinner. That meal would be served as usual, no doubt, at eight o'clock, with all due state and ceremony. The cook and her maids were busied about its preparation even now in this tranquil hour when afternoon melts into evening, sliding so softly from day to night that only those evening hymns of the birds—and on Sundays those melancholy church bells thrilling across the woods—mark the transition. They were scraping vegetables and whipping eggs while the birds were at vespers, and they were talking of the murder as they went about their work. When would they ever cease to gloat with ghoulish gusto on that deadly theme, with endless iteration of "says he" and "says she"?

Lord Cheriton left the stately garden with its quadruple lines of cypress and juniper, its marble balustrades, and clipped yew hedges five feet thick, its statues and alcoves. He passed through a little gate, and across a classic single-arched bridge to the park, where he sauntered slowly beneath his immemorial elms, in a strange dream-like frame of mind, in which he allowed his senses to be beguiled by the balmy afternoon atmosphere and the golden light, until the all-pervading consciousness of a great grief, which had been with him all day, slipped off him for the moment, leaving only a feeling of luxurious repose, rest after labour.

Cheriton Chase was exercising its wonted influence upon him. He loved the place with that deep love which is often felt by the hereditary owner, the man born on the soil, but perhaps still oftener, and to a greater degree by him who has conquered and won the land by his own hard labour of head or hand, by that despicable personage, the self-made man. In all his wanderings—those luxurious reposeful journeyings of the man who has conquered fortune—James Dalbrook's heart yearned towards these ancient avenues and yonder grey walls. House and domain had all the charm of antiquity, and yet they were in a measure his own creation. Everywhere had his hand improved and beautified; and he might say with Augustus that where he found brick he would leave marble. The dense green walls—those open-air courts and quadrangles—those obelisks of cypress and juniper had been there in the dominion of the Strangways, with here and there a mouldering stone Syrinx or a moss-grown Pan; but it was he who brought choicest marbles from Rome and Florence to adorn that stately pleasaunce; it was he who erected yonder fountain, whose waters made a monotonous music by day and night. The

marble balustrades, the mosaic floors, the artistic enrichment of terrace and mansion had been his work. If the farms were perfect it was he who had made them so. If his tenants were contented it was because he had shown himself a model landlord—considerate and liberal, but severely exacting, satsified with nothing less than perfection.

Having thus in a manner created his estate James Dalbrook loved it, as a proud, self-contained man is apt to love the work of his own hands, and now in this quiet Sunday afternoon the very atmosphere of the place soothed him, as if by a spell. A kind of sensuous contentment stole into his heart, with temporary forgetfulness of his daughter's ruined life. But this did not last long. As he drew near the drive by which strangers were allowed to cross the park by immemorial right, he remembered that he had questioned one of the lodge-keepers, but not the other. He struck across an open glade where only old hawthorn trees cast their rugged shadows on the close-cropped turf, and made for the gate opening into the lane.

Mrs. Porter's cottage had its usual aspect, a cottage such as any gentleman or lady of refined taste might have been pleased to inhabit, quaint, mediæval, with heavy timbers across rough cast walls, deep-set casements, picturesque dormers, and thatched roof, with gable ends which were a source of rapture to every artist who visited Cheriton—a cottage embowered in loveliest creeping plants, odorous of jasmine and woodbine, and set in a garden where the standard roses and carnations were rumoured to excel those in her ladyship's own particular flower-garden. Well might a lady who had known better days rejoice in such a haven; more especially when those better days appeared to have raised her no higher than the status of a merchant-captain's wife.

Very few people about Cheriton envied her ladyship. It was considered that, if not born in the purple, she had at least brought her husband a large fortune, and had a right to taste the sweets of wealth. But there were many hard-driven wives and shabby genteel spinsters who envied Mrs. Porter her sinecure at the gate of Cheriton Park, and who looked grudgingly at the garden brimming over with flowers and the lattices shining in the evening sun, and through the open casements at prettily furnished rooms, rich in books and photographs, and other trivial indications of a refined taste.

"It is well to be she," said the curate's wife, as she went home from the village with two mutton chops in her little fancy basket, a basket which suggested ferns, and in which she always carried a trowel, to give the look of casual botany to her housewifely errands. "I wonder whether Lord Cheriton allows her an income for doing nothing, or is it only house, and coals, and candles that she gets?" speculated the curate's wife, who lived in a brand new villa on the outskirts of Cheriton village—a villa that was shabby and dilapidated after three years' occupation, through whose thin walls all the winds

of winter blew, and whose slate roof made the upper floor like a bakehouse under the summer sun.

Lord Cheriton, still sauntering in gloomy meditation, came to the cottage garden outside his gates, and found Mrs. Porter standing among her roses,—a tall, black figure, the very pink and pattern of respectability, with her prayer-book in one hand and a grey silk sunshade in the other. She turned at the sound of those august footsteps, and came to the little garden gate to greet her benefactor, with a grave countenance, as befitted the circumstances.

"Good afternoon," he said briefly. "Have you just come from church?"

"Yes, I have been to the children's service."

"Not very interesting, I should imagine, for anybody past childhood?"

"It is something to do on a Sunday afternoon, and I like to he Mr. Kempster talk to the children."

"Do you? Well, there is no accounting for tastes. Can you tell me anything about my son-in-law's murderer? Have you seen any suspicious characters hanging about? Did you notice any one going into the park on Friday night?"

"No, I have not seen a mortal out of the common way. The gate was locked at the usual hour. Of course the gate would make no difference—it would be easy for any one to get into the park."

"And no one was seen about? It is extraordinary. Have you any idea, Mrs. Porter, any theory about this horrible calamity that has come upon us?"

"How should I have any theory? I am not skilled in finding out such mysteries, like the man who came from London yesterday. Has he made no discoveries?"

"Not one."

"Then you can't expect me to throw a light upon the subject."

"You have an advantage over the London detective. You know the neighbourhood—and you know what kind of man Sir Godfrey was."

"Yes, I know that. How handsome he was, how frank and pleasant looking, and how your daughter adored him. They were a beautiful couple."

Her wan cheeks flushed, and her eyes kindled as she spoke, as if with a genuine enthusiasm.

"They were, and they adored each other. It will break my daughter's heart. You have known trouble—about a daughter. I think you can understand what I feel for my girl."

"I do—I do! Yes, I know what you must feel—what she must feel in her desolation, with all she valued gone from her for ever. But she has not to drink the cup that *my* girl must drink, Lord Cheriton. *She* has not fallen. *She* is not a thing for men to trample under foot, and women to shrink away from."

"Forgive me," said Lord Cheriton, in a softened voice. "I ought not to have spoken of—Mercy."

"You ought never to speak of her—to me. I suppose you thought the wound was so old that it might be touched with impunity, but you were wrong. That wound will never heal."

"I am sure you know that I have always been deeply sorry for you—for that great affliction," said Lord Cheriton gently.

"Sorry, yes, I suppose you were sorry. You would have been sorry if a footman had knocked down one of your Sèvres vases and smashed it. One is sorry for anything that can't be replaced."

"That is a harsh and unjust way of speaking, Mrs. Porter," said Lord Cheriton, drawing himself up suddenly with an air of wounded dignity. "You can tell me nothing about our trouble, I see; and I am not in the mood to talk of any older grief. Good night."

He lifted his hat with grave respect and walked back to the park gate, vanishing slowly from those grey eyes which followed him in eager watchfulness.

"Is he really sorry?" she asked herself. "Can such a man as that be sorry for any one, even his own flesh and blood? He has prospered; all things have gone well with him. Can he be sorry? It is a check, perhaps; a check to his ambitious hopes. It baulks him in his longing to found a family. He looks pale and worn, as if he had suffered: and at his age, after a prosperous life, it must be hard to suffer."

So mused the woman who had seen better days—embittered doubtless by her own decadence—embittered still more by her daughter's fall.

It was nearly ten years since the daughter had eloped with a middle-aged Colonel in a cavalry regiment, a visitor at the Chase—a man of fortune and high family, with about as diabolical a reputation as a man could enjoy and yet hold Her Majesty's commission.

Mercy Porter's fall had been a surprise to everybody. She was a girl of shy and reserved manners, graver and sadder than youth should be. She had been kept very close by her mother, allowed to make no friendships among the girls in the village, to have no companions of her own age. She had early shown a considerable talent for music, and her piano had been her chief pleasure and occupation. Lady Cheriton had taken a good deal of notice of her when she grew up, and she might have done well, the gossips said, when they recalled the story of her disgrace; but she chose to fall in love with a married man of infamous character, a notorious profligate, and he had but to beckon with his finger for her to go off with him. The circumstances of her going off were discussed confidentially at feminine tea-drinkings, and it was wondered that Mrs. Porter could hold her head so high, and show herself at church three times on a Sunday, and entertain the curate and his wife to afternoon tea, considering what had happened.

The curate and his wife were new arrivals comparatively, and only knew that dismal common story from hearsay. They were both impressed by Mrs. Porter's regular attendance at the church services, and by the excellence of that cup of tea with which she was always ready to entertain them whenever they cared to drop in at her cottage between four and five o'clock.

The inquest was opened early on the afternoon of Monday at the humble little inn near the forge, with its rustic sign, "Live and let live." Juanita gave her evidence with a stony calmness which impressed those who heard her more than the stormiest outburst of grief would have done. Her mother and her husband's mother had both implored her not to break down, to bear herself heroically through this terrible ordeal, and they were both in the room to support her by their presence. Both were surprised at the firmness of her manner, the clear tones of her voice as she made her statement, telling how she had heard the shot in her dream, and how she had gone down to the drawing-room to find Sir Godfrey lying face downward on the carpet, in front of the chair where he had been sitting, his hand still upon the open book, which had fallen as he fell.

"Did you think of going outside to see if any one was lurking about?"

"No, I thought of nothing but trying to save him. I did not believe that he was dead."

There was a look of agony in her large wide open eyes as she said this—a piteous remembrance of the moment while she still hoped—which thrilled the spectators.

"What course did you take?"

"I rang for the servants. They came after a time that seemed long—but I believe they came quickly."

"And after they had come——?"

"I remembered nothing more. They wanted me to believe that he was dead—and I would not—I could not believe—and—I remember no more till next day."

"That will do, Lady Carmichael. I will not trouble you further."

Lady Jane and Lady Cheriton wanted to take her away after this, but she insisted upon remaining.

"I wish to hear every word," she said.

They submitted, and the three women, robed in densest black, sat in a little group behind the Coroner till the end of that day's inquiry.

No new facts were elicited from any of the witnesses, and nothing had resulted from the elaborate search made, not only throughout Lord Cheriton's domain, but in the neighbourhood. No suspicious prowlers had been heard of. The gipsies who had contributed to the gaiety of the wedding day had been ascertained to have left the

Isle of Purbeck a fortnight before the murder, and to be delighting the larger world between Portsmouth and Havant. Nothing had been discovered; no sale of revolver or gun to any questionable purchaser at Dorchester; no indication, however slight, which might put a keen-witted detective upon the trail. Mr. Churton confessed himself completely at fault.

The jury drove to Cheriton House to view the body, and the inquest was adjourned for a fortnight, in the expectation that some discovery might be made in the interim. The funeral would take place at the usual time; there was nothing now to hinder the victim being laid in his last resting-place in the old Saxon church at Milbrook.

Bills offering a reward of £500 for any information leading to the discovery of the murderer were all over the village, and in every village and town within a radius of forty miles. The stimulus of cupidity was not wanting to sharpen the rural wit. Mr. Churton shook his head despondently when he talked over the inquest with Lord Cheriton later in the day, and owned himself "out of it."

"I have been in many dark cases, my Lord," he said, "and I've had many hard nuts to crack, but this beats 'em all. I can't see my way to making anything of it; and unless you can furnish me with any particulars of the poor young gentleman's past life, of an enlightening character, I don't see much hope of getting ahead."

"You stick to your idea of the murder being an act of revenge?"

"What other reason could there be for such a murder?"

That question seemed unanswerable, and Lord Cheriton let it pass. Matthew Dalbrook and his elder son were to dine with him that evening, in order to talk quietly and calmly over the terrible event of last week, and the bearing which it must have upon his daughter's future life. Lady Cheriton and Lady Jane Carmichael had lived entirely on the upper floor, taking such poor apologies for meals as they could be induced to take in her ladyship's morning-room. That closed door at the eastern end of the corridor exercised its solemn influence upon the whole house. Those mourning women never went in or out without looking that way—and again and again through the long still days they visited that chamber of death, carrying fairest blooms of stephanotis or camellia, whitest rose-buds, waxen lilies; kneeling in silent prayer beside that white bed.

During all those dismal days before the funeral Juanita lived secluded in her own room, only leaving it to go to that silent room where the white bed and the white flowers made an atmosphere of cold purity, which chilled her heart as if she too were dead. She counted the hours which remained before even this melancholy link between life and death would be broken, and when she must stretch out her hands blindly to find one whom the earth would hide from her for evermore. In the brief snatches of troubled sleep that had visited her since Friday night she had awakened with her husband's

name upon her lips, with outstretched hands that yearned for the touch of his, awakening slowly to consciousness of the horrible reality. In every dream that she had dreamed he had been with her, and in some of those dreams had appeared with a distinctness which involved the memory of her sorrow. Yes, she had thought him dead—yes, she had seen him stretched bleeding at her feet; but that had been dream and delusion. Reality was here, here in his strong voice, here in the warm grasp of his hand, here in the lying vision that was kinder than truth.

Mr. Dalbrook and his son arrived at a quarter to eight, and were received by Lord Cheriton in the library. The drawing-room was now a locked chamber, and it would be long doubtless before any one would have the courage to occupy that room. The Dalbrooks were to stay at Cheriton till after the funeral. Matthew Dalbrook had been Sir Godfrey's solicitor, and it would be his duty to read the will.

He was also one of the trustees to Juanita's marriage settlement, and the time had come—all too soon—when the terms of that settlement would have to be discussed.

"How is my cousin?" asked Theodore, when he had shaken hands with Lord Cheriton.

"Have you seen her since—Friday?"

"Yes, I saw her on Saturday morning. She was terribly changed."

"A ghastly change, is it not?" said Lord Cheriton, with a sigh. "I doubt if there is any improvement since then: but she behaved splendidly at the inquest this afternoon. We were all prepared for her breaking down. God knows whether she will ever get the better of her grief, or whether she will go down to the grave a broken-hearted woman. Oh! Matt," turning to his kinsman and contemporary, "such a trial as this teaches us how Providence can laugh at our best laid plans. I thought I had made my daughter's happiness as secure as the foundations of this old house."

"You did your best, James. No man can do more."

Theodore was silent for the most part after his inquiry about his cousin. He listened while the elder men talked, and gave his opinion when it was asked for, and showed himself a clear-headed man of business; but his depression was not the less evident. The thought of Juanita's grief—the contrast between her agony now and her joyousness the day she was at Dorchester—was never absent from his mind; and the talk of the two elder men, the discussion as to the extent of her possessions, her power to do this and that, the house she was to live in, the establishment she was to keep, jarred upon him horribly.

"By the conditions of the settlement, the Priory is to be hers for her life, with everything it contains. By the conditions of Sir Godfrey's will, in the event of his leaving no issue, the Priory estate is to

go after his widow's death to Mrs. Grenville's eldest son, or failing a son in that direction, then to Mrs. Morningside's eldest son. Should neither sister leave a son surviving at the time of Lady Carmichael's death the estate is to be sold, and the product divided in equal portions among the surviving nieces; but at the present rate at which the two ladies are filling their nurseries there is very little doubt there will be a surviving son. Mrs. Grenville was Sir Godfrey's favourite, I know, and I can understand his giving her boy the estate, and thus founding a family, rather than dividing the property between the issue of the two sisters."

"I do not think anybody can find fault with his will," said Lord Cheriton. "God knows that when I saw him sign it in my room in Victoria Street, an hour after his marriage, nothing was further from my thoughts than the idea that the will would come into force within the next fifty years. It seemed almost an idle precaution for so young a man to be in such a hurry to set his house in order."

"Do you think Juanita will decide to live at the Priory?" asked Mr. Dalbrook.

"It would seem more natural for her to live here with her mother and me, but I fear that this house will seem for ever accursed to her. She will remember that it was her own whim to spend her honeymoon here. It will seem to her as if she had brought her husband to his death. Oh, God, when I remember how her mother and I suggested other places—how we talked to her of the Tyrol and the Dolomites, of Hungary, Norway—and with what a kind of childish infatuation she clung to her fancy for this house, it seems as if a hideous fatality guided her to her doom. It is her doom, as well as his. I do not believe she will ever be a happy woman again."

"It may seem so now to us all, to herself most of all, poor girl," answered Matthew Dalbrook. "But I never saw a sorrow yet that Time could not heal, and the sorrow of a girl of nineteen leaves such a margin for Time's healing powers. God grant that you and I may both live to see her bright and happy again—with a second husband. There is something prosaic, I feel, in the very sound; but there may be some touch of romance even in a second love."

He did not see the painful change in his son's face while he was talking: the sudden crimson which faded slowly to a ghastly pallor. It had never occurred to Matthew Dalbrook that his son Theodore had felt anything more than a cousinly regard for Lord Cheriton's daughter.

The funeral took place on the following Wednesday—one of those funerals about which people talk for a month, and in which grief is almost lost sight of by the majority of the mourners in a feverish excitement. The procession of carriages, very few of them un

occupied, was nearly half a mile long—the little churchyard at Milbrook could scarcely contain the mourners. The sisters' husbands were there, with hats hidden in crape, and solemn countenances; honestly sorry for their brother-in-law's death, but not uninterested in his will. All the district, within a radius of thirty miles, had been on the alert to pay this last mark of respect to a young man who had been universally liked, and whose melancholy fate had moved every heart.

The will was read in the library, and Juanita appeared for the first time since her cousins had been at Cheriton. She came into the room with her mother, and went to Matthew and his son quietly, and gave a hand to each, and answered their grave inquiries about her health without one tear or one faltering accent; and then she took her seat beside her father's chair, and waited for the reading of the will. It seemed to her as if it contained her husband's last words, addressed to her from his grave. He knew when he wrote or dictated those words that she would not hear them in his lifetime. The will left her a life-interest in everything, except twenty thousand pounds in consols to Lady Jane, a few legacies to old servants and local charities, and a few souvenirs to college friends. Sir Godfrey had held the estate in fee simple, and could deal with it as he pleased. He expressed a hope that if his wife survived him she should continue to live at the Priory, and that the household should remain, as far as possible, unchanged, that no old horse should ever be sold, and no dogs disposed of in any way off the premises. This last request was to secure a continuance of old customs. His father had never allowed a horse that he had kept over a twelvemonth to be sold; and had never parted with a dog. His own hand shot the horse that was no longer fit for service; his own hand poisoned the dog whose life had ceased to be a blessing.

When the will was finished, and it was by no means a lengthy document, Lady Jane kissed her daughter-in-law.

"You will do as he wished, won't you, dearest?" she said, softly.

"Live at the Priory—yes, Lady Jane, unless you will live there instead. It would be more natural for you to be mistress there. When—when—my darling made that will he must have thought of me as an old woman, likely to survive him by a few years at most, and it would seem natural to him for me to go on living in his house—to continue to live—those were his words, you know—to continue to live in the home of my married life. But all is different now, and it would be better for you to have the Priory. It has been your home so long. It is full of associations and interests for you. I can live anywhere—anywhere except in this detested house."

She had spoken in a low voice all the time, so low as to be quite inaudible to her father and Matthew Dalbrook, who were talking confidentially upon the other side of the wide oak table.

"My love, it is your house. It will be full of associations for you too—the memories of his youth. It may comfort you by-and-by to live among the things he cared for. And I can be with you there now and then. You will bear with a melancholy old woman now and then," pleaded Lady Jane, with tearful tenderness.

The only answer was a sob, and a clinging pressure of the hand; and then the three women quietly left the room. Their interest in the business was over. Blinds had been drawn up and Venetian shutters opened. There was a flood of sunshine on the staircase and in the corridors as Juanita went back to her room. The perfume of roses and the breath of summer came in at the open windows.

"Oh, God, how the sun shines!" she cried, in a sudden agony of remembrance.

Those odours from the garden, the blue sky, summer greenery and dazzling summer light brought back the image of her vanished happiness. Last week, less than a week ago, she had been one of the joyous creatures in that glad, gay world—joyous as the thrush whose song was thrilling upon the soft sweet air.

Lady Jane's two sons-in-law had drawn near the oak table at which the lawyer was seated with his papers before him.

Jessica's husband, Mr. Grenville, was sporting. His thoughts were centred in his stable, where he found an all-sufficient occupation for his intellectual powers in an endless buying, exchanging, selling, summering and wintering his stud; in the invention of improved bits, and the development of new ideas in saddlery; in the performance of operations that belong rather to the professional veterinary than to the gentleman at large, and in the conversation of his stud groom. These resources filled up all the margin that was left for a man who hunted four days a week in his own district, and who often got a fifth and even a sixth day in other counties accessible by rail. It may have been a natural result of Mr. Grenville's devotion to the stable that Mrs. Grenville was absorbed by her nursery; or it may have been a natural bent on the lady's part. However this might be, the lady and the gentleman followed parallel lines, in which their interests never clashed. He talked of hardly anything but his horses; she rarely mentioned any other subject than her children, or something bearing upon her children's well-being. He believed his horses to be the best in the county; she considered her babies unsurpassed in creation. Both in their line were supremely happy.

Mr. Morningside, married to Sir Godfrey's youngest sister, Ruth, was distinctly Parliamentary; and had no sympathies in common with such men as Hugo Grenville. To him horses were animals with four legs who dragged burdens; who were expensive to keep, and whose legs were liable to "fill" or to develop superfluous bone on the slightest provocation. His only idea of a saddle horse was a slow and stolid cob, for whose virtuous disposition and powerful

bone he had paid nearly three hundred pounds, and on which he pounded round the park three or four times every morning during the Parliamentary season, an exercise of which he was about as fond as he was of Pullna water, but which had been recommended him for the good of his liver.

Mr. Morningside had a castle in the north, too near Newcastle to be altogether beautiful, and he had a small suite upon a fifth floor in Queen Anne's Mansion. He had taken this apartment as a bachelor *pied à terre* for the Parliamentary season; and he had laid considerable emphasis upon the landowner's necessity for stern economy which had constrained him to take rooms so small as to be altogether "impossible" for his wife. Mrs. Morningside was, however, of a different opinion. No place was impossible for her which her dear Stuart deigned to occupy. She did not mind small rooms, or a fifth story. Was there not a lift, and were there not charming people living ever so much nearer the skies? She did not mind even what she gracefully described as "pigging it," for her dear Stuart's sake. She was utterly unlike her elder sister, and she had no compunction at placing over two hundred miles between her and her nursery.

"They'd wire for me if anything went wrong," she said, "and the express would take me home in a few hours."

"That would depend upon what time you got the wire. The express doesn't go every quarter of an hour like a Royal Blue," replied Mr. Morningside, gloomily.

He was a dry-as-dust man; one of those self-satisfied persons who are never less alone than when alone. He had married at five and thirty, and the comfortable habits of a priggish bachelor still clove to him after six years of married bliss. He was fond of his wife in her place, and he thought her a very charming woman at the head of his table, and receiving his guests at Morningside Castle. But it was essential to his peace that he should have many solitary hours in which to pore over Blue books and meditate upon an intended speech. He fancied himself greatly as a speaker, and he was one of those Parliamentary bores whose ornate periods are made mincemeat of by the reporters. He looked to a day when he would take his place with Burke and Walpole, and other giants, whose oratory had been received coldly in the dawn of their senatorial career. He gave himself up to much study of politics past and present, and was one of those well-informed bores who are only useful as a store-house of hard facts for the use of livelier speakers. When a man had to speak upon a subject of which he knew nothing, he went to Mr. Morningside as to a Parliamentary Encyclopædia.

To sustain these stores of knowledge Mr. Morningside required much leisure for what is called heavy reading; and heavy reading is not easy in that genial family life which means incessant talk and

incessant interruption. Mr. Morningside would have preferred, therefore, to keep his den on the fifth floor to himself; but his wife loved London, and he could not refuse her the privilege of occasionally sharing his nest on a level with the spires and towers of the great city. She made her presence agreeably felt by tables covered with photograph easels, Vallauris vases, stray flowers in specimen glasses, which were continually being knocked over, Japanese screens, and every known variety of chair-back; and albeit he was an essentially dutiful husband, Mr. Morningside never felt happier than when he had seen his Ruth comfortably seated in the Bournemouth express on her way to the home of her forefathers for one of those protracted visits that no one but a near relation would venture to make. He left her cheerily on such occasions, with a promise to run down to the Priory on Saturday evenings whenever it was possible to leave the helm.

Mr. Morningside had liked his brother-in-law as well as it was in him to like any man, and had been horrified at that sudden inexplicable doom; but Sir Godfrey being snatched off this earth in the flower of his age, Mr. Morningside thought it only natural that the young Morningsides should derive some benefit, immediate or contingent, from their uncle's estate. It was, therefore, with some disgust that he heard that clause in the will which gave Jessica's sons the preference over all the sons of Ruth. True that, failing any son of Jessica's, the estate was to lapse to the eldest surviving son of Ruth; but what earthly value was such a reversionary interest as this in the case of a lady whose nursery was like a rabbit warren?

"I congratulate you on your eldest boy's prospects, Grenville," said Mr. Morningside, sourly. "Your Tom," a boy whom he hated, "will come into a very fine thing one of these days."

"Humph," muttered Grenville, "Lady Carmichael's is a good life, and I should be very sorry to see it shortened. Besides, who can tell? Before this time next year there may be a nearer claimant."

"Lord have mercy upon us," exclaimed Morningside, "I never thought of *that* contingency."

CHAPTER IX.

"Poor girl! put on thy stifling widow's weed,
And 'scape at once from Hope's accursèd bands;
To-day thou wilt not see him, nor to-morrow,
And the next day will be a day of sorrow."

Life falls back into old grooves after calamities the most stupendous. After fires—after plagues—after earthquakes—people breakfast and dine, marry and are given in marriage. A few more graves testify to the fever that has decimated a city; a ruined village here and there along the smiling southern shore, shells that were once houses, churches beneath whose shivered domes no worshipper dare ever kneel again, bear witness to the earthquake; but the monotonous common-place of life goes on all the same in city and village, on hill and sea-shore. And so when Godfrey Carmichael was laid in his grave, when the police had exhausted their ingenuity in the vain endeavour to fathom the secret of his death—when the coroner had adjourned and again adjourned his inquiry, and an open verdict had been pronounced, life in Cheriton House resumed its old order, and the room in which the bridegroom had lain murdered at the feet of the bride was again thrown open to the sun and air, and to the sound of voices, and to the going and coming of daily life.

Lady Cheriton would have had the room closed; for a year at least, she pleaded; but her husband told her that to make it a sealed chamber now would be to throw it out of use for his lifetime.

"If we once let servants and people think and talk of it as a haunted room nobody will ever like to occupy it again so long as this house stands," he said. "Stories will be invented—those things shape themselves unawares in the human mind—sounds will be heard, and the whole house will become uninhabitable. We both love our house, Maria. Our own hands have fashioned it after our own hearts. It would be folly to put a brand upon it, and to say henceforward it shall be accursed to us. God knows I am sorry for Juanita's sorrow, sorry for my own loss; but I look to you to help me in keeping our home bright and pleasant for our declining days."

It was the habit of her life to obey him and try to please him in all things; so she answered gently—

"Of course, dear James, it shall be as you wish. I feel sure you are right. It would be wicked to shut up that lovely room"—with a faint shudder; "but I shall never go near the west window without thinking of—our dear boy. And I'm afraid Juanita will never be able to endure the room."

"Perhaps not. We can use the other rooms when she is here. She has her own house now; and I dare say it will be some time before she will care to cross this threshold. The house must seem

fatal to her. It was her own caprice that brought him here. I'm afraid that recollection will torture her, poor child."

It was finally decided therefore that the drawing-room should be used nightly, as it had been in all the peaceful years that were gone. The lamps with their gay shades of rose or amber made spots of coloured light amidst tables heaped with flowers. All the choicest blooms that the hothouses or the gardens could produce were brought as of old, like offerings to a pagan shrine. The numberless toys upon the tables were set out in the old orderly disorder—porcelain and enamel bon-bon boxes on one table—antique watches and gold and silver snuff-boxes on another—bronzes, intaglios, coins, medals, filigree scent bottles upon a third, and a background of flowers everywhere. The piano was opened, and the candles lighted ready for her ladyship, who sang Spanish ballads delightfully even yet, and who was in the habit of singing to her husband of an evening whenever they were alone.

They were generally alone now, not being able to receive visitors from the outside world at such a time. The vicar of the parish dined at Cheriton now and then, and Matthew Dalbrook spent a night there occasionally, and talked over business matters, and the future development of a tract of land at Swanage, which formed a portion of the original Strangway estate.

The widow had taken possession of her new home, the home which they two were to have lived in for half a century of loving union. They had joked about their golden wedding as they sat at lunch on the lawn that day; had laughed at the thought of how they would look in white hair and wrinkles, and then had sighed at the thought of how those they loved now would be gone before that day came, and how the friends who gathered round them would be new friends, the casual acquaintances of the passing years promoted to friendship in the place of those earlier, nearer, dearer friends whom death had taken.

They had talked of their silver wedding, which seemed a happier idea; for dear Lady Jane and Juanita's mother and father might all live to see that day. They would be old, of course, older by five and twenty years; but not too old to be happy and beloved. The young wife and husband pictured the lawn on which they were sitting crowded with friends and tenants and villagers and children; and planned the feasting and the sports, which were to have a touch of originality, something out of the beaten track, which something was not easy to devise.

And now she and Lady Jane were sitting in the same spot, in the sultry August evening, two desolate women; the tawny giant at their feet, *his* dog, the mastiff Styx, looking up at them now and then with great serious eyes, as if asking what had become of his master.

Juanita was strangely altered since the days of her honeymoon.

Her cheeks had hollowed, and the large dark eyes looked larger, and gave a haggard expression to the pallid face; but she was bearing her sorrow bravely for Lady Jane's sake, as Lady Jane had done for her sake, in the beginning of things. That gentle lady had broken down after the funeral, and Juanita had been constrained to forget her own agony for a brief space in trying to comfort the bereaved mother; and so the two acted and re-acted upon each other, and it was well for them to be together.

They had settled down in the old house before they had been there a week. Lady Jane put off her return to Swanage indefinitely. She could drive over now and then to supervise the gardening, and she would stay at the Priory as long as Juanita wanted her.

"That would be always," said Juanita.

"Ah, my love, what would not do. I don't forget all that has been written about mothers-in-law. There must be some truth in it."

"Oh, but you forget. That is when there is a son and husband to quarrel about," said Juanita, with a sudden sob. "We have no cause for jealousy. We have only our dead."

Lady Jane wanted to establish her daughter-in-law in that cheerful sitting-room which had been her own, but here Juanita opposed her.

"I am not going to have it—now," she said, resolutely. "It shall be your room always. No one else shall use it. I am going to have his room for my den."

"My dearest, it is the dullest room in the house."

"It was his room, and I like it better than any other in the world."

She arranged all her own books and possessions in the large room looking into the stable yard, which had been Sir Godfrey's study from the time he went to Eton. She found all his Eton books on a lower shelf of one of the book-cases, and she sat on the floor for an hour dusting grammars and dictionary, First Greek Reader, Latin Gradus, and all the rest of them. She found his college books, with the college arms upon them, on another shelf. She would have nothing disturbed or altered, and she was supremely indifferent to the question of incongruity. Her own book-cases from Cheriton, the dainty toy book-cases of inlaid satin wood, were squeezed into the recesses on each side of the fireplace. Her photographs of mother, father, friends, horses, and dogs, were arranged upon the carved oak mantelpiece, above the quaint little cupboards with carved doors, spoil of old Belgian churches, still full of choice cigars, the young man's store. His spurs and hunting-crops, canes, and boxing-gloves, decorated the panel between the two tall windows. His despatch box still stood upon the library table, and the dog Styx pushed the door open whenever it was left ajar and strolled into the room as by old established right.

She felt herself nearer her dead husband here than anywhere else; nearer even than in the churchyard, where she and Lady Jane went every afternoon with fresh flowers for his grave. They had not laid him in the family vault, but among the graves of gentle and simple, under the sunny turf. The marble was not yet carven which was to mark out his grave amidst those humbler resting-places.

Theodore Dalbrook had not seen his cousin since the day of the funeral. His father and his two sisters had called upon her at the Priory, and had brought back an account of the quiet dignity with which she bore herself in her melancholy position.

"I did not think she had so much solid sense," said Janet; and then she and Sophia talked about the Priory as a dwelling-house, and of its inferiority to Cheriton, and speculated upon the amount of their cousin's income.

"She has a splendid position. She will be a fine catch for some one by-and-by," said Harrington. "I hope she won't go and throw herself away upon an adventurer."

"I hope not," said his father, "but I suppose she will marry again? That seems inevitable."

"I don't see that it is inevitable," argued Theodore, almost angrily. "She was devotedly attached to her husband. I suppose there is now and then a woman who can remain faithful to a first love——"

"When the first love is alive, and not always then," put in Sophia, flippantly. "Of course she will marry again. If she wanted to remain single people would not let her, with her income."

Theodore got up and walked to the window. His sister's talk often set his teeth on edge, but rarely so much as it did to-day.

"You talk of her as if she were the most shallow-brained of women," he exclaimed, with his back to the family group, looking out with gloomy eyes into the old-fashioned street, the narrow circumscribed view which he had hated of late with a deadly hatred.

"I don't think she is very deep," answered Sophia. "She never could appreciate Darwin. She told me once that she wondered what I could find to interest me in earth-worms."

"A woman must, indeed, be shallow who feels no interest in that thrilling subject," sneered Theodore.

"Upon my word, now," said his father, "Darwin's book interested me, though I'm not a scientific man. And I never see a worm wriggling off the gardener's spade without feeling that I ought to be grateful to him as a factor in the landed interest. Perhaps," continued Mr. Dalbrook, musingly, "my own practice in the conveyancing line owes something of its substantial character to earth-worms. If it were not for *them* there might be no land to convey."

The conversation drifted lightly away from Juanita and her

sorrow, but her image still filled Theodore's mind, and he left the drawing-room and the frivolous talk and the clinking of teacups and teaspoons, and went out in the declining light to walk in the avenue of sycamores on the edge of the old city.

He had not called upon his cousin in her new home; he shrank from the very idea of meeting her while her sorrow was still new, while her thoughts and feelings were concentrated upon that one subject, while he could only be to her as an unwelcome intruder from that outside world she loathed, as grief loathes all but its own sad memories.

Had the calamity which had desolated her life brought her any nearer to him who had loved her so long and so unselfishly? Alas, no; he told himself that if she ever loved again, it would be to a stranger that her reawakening heart would open rather than to the rejected lover of the past, the man whom her memory would couple with the husband she had lost, and whom she would compare disadvantageously with that chosen one.

No, he told himself, there was little more chance for him in the future than there had been in the past. She liked him and trusted him, with a sisterly affection which nothing short of a miracle could warm into love. Passion does not grow out of such placid beginnings.

In her very dawn of girlhood she had been in love with Godfrey: had blushed at his coming: had quarrelled with him, and wept stormy tears: had suffered all those alternations of joy and grief, pride and self-abasement, which accompany love in an impassioned nature. Theodore remembered her treatment of the fifth-form Etonian, of the undergraduate, remembered the passionate drama perpetually being acted in those two young lives, a drama which he had watched with aching heart; and he felt that he could never be as that first lover had been. He was associated with the commonplace of her life. She had laughed often at his dry-as-dust talk with her father—the dull discussions about leases and bills of dilapidation. A solicitor living from year's end to year's end in a country town—what a dreary person he must needs appear beside the brilliant young Patrician, full of the gladness of the life that knows neither labour nor care. He sickened at the thought of that contrast.

He had served his father faithfully hitherto, and the bond between father and son had been one of strong affection as well as duty; but for the last year there had been growing upon him an inexpressible weariness of the house in which he was born, and the city in which he had lived the chief part of his uneventful life. He had struggled against the disgust of familiar things, telling himself that it was an unworthy feeling, and that he would be a snob if he indulged it. Yet the disgust grew into absolute loathing; the monotonous days, the repetitive work, oppressed him life a nightmare. Since Juanita's marriage the burden had become more and

more intolerable. To be so near her, yet so far. To be letting life creep away in dull drudgery which could never bring him nearer her social level; to feel that all his pursuits and associations were beneath the woman he loved, and could never arouse the faintest interest in her mind. This was almost too bitter to be borne, and he had for some time past been meditating some way of escape, some manner of release from these old fetters into the wider arena of the outer world.

Such escape was not easy. He had to think of his father, that indulgent, large-minded father who had given his son a very remunerative share in his practice at an age when most young men are dependent for every suit of clothes or five-pound note upon parental bounty and parental caprice. He knew that his father looked to him for an entire release from work before they were many years older; and that he would then find himself sole master of a business worth at least fifteen hundred a year. All this had come to him and would come to him easily, as the reward of conscientious and intelligent work. It was a prospect which few young men would forego without considerable hesitation; but Theodore hardly thought of the substantial advantages which he was so eager to sacrifice. His sole hesitation was on account of the disappointment which the step he contemplated would inflict upon his father.

He was not without a foreshadowing of a plan by which that disappointment might be in somewise lessened. He had kept an eye upon his brother for some time past, and he had discovered that the young man's fervour for the Anglican Church had begun to cool. There were all the signs of wavering in that gifted youth. At one time he devoted all his study to the writings of Cardinal Newman, Hurrel Froude, and the Tractarian Party—he lived in the atmosphere of Oxford in the forties; he talked of Cardinal Manning as the head and front of religious thought. He was on the verge of deciding for the Old Faith. Then a sudden change came over the spirit of his dream. He began to have doubts, not of the reformed faith, but of every Western creed.

"Light comes from the East," he told his sisters with an oracular air. "I doubt if there is any nearer resting-place for the sole of my foot than the Temple of Buddha. I find there the larger creed for which my mind yearns—boundless vistas behind and before me. I begin to entertain painful doubts of my fitness for the Anglican Church. I might be a power, perhaps, but it would be outside those narrow bounds—like Voysey, or Stopford Brooke. The Church, with its present limitations, would not hold me."

The sisters sympathized, argued, quoted Essays and Reviews, and talked of Darwin and Spencer, Huxley and Comte. Theodore listened and said nothing. He saw which way the tide was turning, and rejoiced in the change of the current.

And now this sultry August afternoon, pacing up and down the

green walk, he was expectant of an opportunity of discussing his brother's future with that gentleman himself, as Harrington was in the habit of taking his afternoon constitutional, book in hand, upon this very path.

He appeared by-and-by, carrying an open volume of Max Müller, and looking at the nursemaids and perambulators.

"What, Theo, taking your meditative cigar? You don't often give yourself a holiday before dinner."

"No, but I wanted to talk to you alone, and I knew this was your beat."

"Nothing gone wrong, I hope."

"No; it is your future I want to discuss, if you don't mind."

"My future is wrapped in a cloud of doubt," replied the young man, dreamily. "Were the Church differently constituted—were the minds that rule in it of a larger cast, a wider grasp, a——"

"Harrington, how would you like the law as a profession?" Theodore asked abruptly, when the other began to hesitate.

"My dear fellow, it is all very well to ask me that question, when you know there is no room for me in my father's office," retorted Harrington, with a contemptuous wave of that long, lean white hand, which always reminded him of St. Francis de Sales or Savonarola; not that he had any positive knowledge of what those saintly hands were like.

"Room might be made for you," said Theodore.

"I should not care to accept a subordinate position—Aut Cæsar——"

"So far as the Cæsar-ship of a provincial solicitor's office can go the whole empire may be yours by-and-by, if you like—provided you put your shoulder to the wheel and pass your examinations."

"Do you mean to say that you would throw up your position—and an income which would allow of your marrying to-morrow, if you chose—to make room for me?"

"If I can get my father's consent, yes, decidedly."

"And how do you propose to exist without a profession?"

"I don't propose anything of the kind. I mean to go to the Bar'

"Oh, I begin to understand. A solicitor's office is not good enough for you?"

"I don't say that; but I have taken a disgust—an unreasonable disgust, no doubt—to that branch of the law, and I am very sick of Dorchester."

"So am I," retorted Harrington, gazing vaguely at a pretty nursemaid. "We are agreed there at any rate. And you want to follow in Lord Cheriton's track, and make a great name?"

"It is only one in a thousand who succeeds as James Dalbrook has succeeded; but if I go to the Bar you may be sure I shall do my best to get on; and I shall start with a pretty good knowledge of common law."

"You want to be in London—you are pining for an æsthetic centre," sighed Harrington.

"I don't quite know what that is, but I should prefer London to Dorchester."

"So should I—and you want me to take your place at the mill; to grind out my soul in the dull round that has sickened you."

"The life has begun to pall upon me, but I think it ought to suit you," answered Theodore, thoughtfully. "You are fonder of home—and of the sisters—than I am. You get on better with them."

"You have been rather grumpy lately, I admit," said Harrington.

"And you have let yourself cool upon your Divinity exam. You evidently don't mean the Church?"

"I have outgrown the Church. You can't put a quart of wine into a pint bottle."

"And you must do something. I don't think you can do anything so good as to take my place, and become my father's right hand until he chooses to retire, and leave you the practice. You will have married by that time, perhaps, and will have sobered down—intellectually. Morally you are one of the steadiest fellows I know."

"I suppose I ought to consider this what the house-agents call an unusual opportunity?" said Harrington; "but you must give me time to think it over."

"Take time," answered Theodore, briefly. "I'll talk to my father in the meanwhile."

Mr. Dalbrook received his elder son's communication as if it had been a blow from an enemy's hand.

"Do you suppose that ass Harrington can ever take your place?" he exclaimed. Whereupon Theodore took pains to explain that his brother was by no means an ass, and that he was only labouring under that burden of small affectations which weighs down a young man who has been allowed to live too much in the society of young women, sisters and sisters' friends, and to consider all his own utterances oracular.

"He is not so fit for the Church as Brown is," said Theodore, "and he will only addle his brains if he reads any more theology. He won't be content with Paley and Butler, and the good old books which have been the turnpike road to ordination for a century. He is all for new ideas, and the new ideas are too big for him. But if you will give him his articles, and teach him, as you taught me——"

"I don't think I taught you much. You seemed to get at everything by instinct."

"Ah, you taught me my profession without knowing it; and you will teach Harrington with just as little trouble. He will shake off that husk of affectation in your office—no solicitor can be affected—and he will come out a good lawyer; while I am trying my luck in Temple chambers, reading, and waiting for briefs. With your help,

by-and-by, I am bound to do something. I shall get a case or two upon this circuit, anyhow."

"I can't think what has put this folly in your head, Theo," said his father, with a vexed air.

"It is not folly, father; it is not a caprice," the young man protested, with sudden earnestness. "For God's sake don't think me ungrateful, or that I would willingly turn my back upon my duty to you. Only—young people have troubles of their own, don't you know?—and of late I have not been altogether happy. I have not prospered in my love-dream; and so I have set up a new idol, that idol so many men worship with more or less reward—Success. I want to spread my wings, and see if they will carry me on a longer flight than I have taken yet."

"Well, it would be selfish of me to baulk you, even if your loss were to cripple me altogether. And it won't do that. I am strong enough to work on for a few years longer than I intended."

"Oh, my dear father, I hope it won't come to that. I hope my change of plan won't shorten your years of leisure."

"I am afraid that's inevitable, Theo. I can't transfer a fine practice to my son till I've made him a good lawyer—and God knows how long that will take in Harrington's case. Judging by my present estimation of him, I should say half a century. But don't be downhearted, Theo. You shall eat your dinners. You shall qualify for the Woolsack. After all, I don't know how a life of leisure might suit me. It would be a change from the known to the unknown, almost as stupendous as the change from life to death."

Perhaps Matthew Dalbrook had fathomed that secret woe at which Theodore had hinted darkly; in any case he took his elder son's defection more easily than might have been hoped, and bore patiently with some preliminary fatuity from the younger son, who accepted the gift of his articles, an allowance of two hundred pounds per annum, and the promise of a junior partnership in the near future, with the languid politeness of one who felt that he was renouncing a mitre.

Everything was settled off-hand, and Theodore was to go to London at the end of September to select and furnish his modest chambers in one of those grave old courts of the Temple, and be ready to begin his new life with the beginning of term.

He had not seen Juanita since the funeral, and she had been told nothing of this sudden reconstruction of his life; but he determined to see her before he left Dorchester, and he considered that he had a right, as her kinsman, to bid her good-bye. Perhaps in his heart-weariness he was inclined to exaggerate the solemnity of that leave-taking, somewhat as if he had been starting for Australia.

He drove over to the Priory on a dull, grey afternoon, his last day in Dorchester. His portmanteaus were packed, and all things were ready for an early departure next morning. Sorely as he had

sickened of the good old town which was his birth-place, he felt a shade of melancholy at the idea of cutting himself adrift altogether from that quiet haven; and the love of those open stretches of barren heath and those swampy meadows and grazing cattle on the way to Milbrook, was engrained in him deeper than he knew. It was a landscape which took a peculiar charm from the grey dimness of an autumnal atmosphere, and it seemed to Theodore Dalbrook that those level pastures and winding waters had never looked fairer than they looked to-day.

He had written to his cousin a day before to tell her of his intended visit. It was too solemn a matter in his own mind for him to leave the finding her at home to chance. His groom took the dog-cart round to the stables, while he was ushered at once to the drawing-room where Lady Carmichael was sitting at her work-table in the bow window, with Styx stretched on a lion-skin at her feet.

The silence of the house struck Theodore Dalbrook painfully as he followed the footman across the hall and along a corridor which led to the drawing-room—that death-like silence of a roomy old mansion in which there are neither children nor guests, only one lonely inhabitant waited upon by solemn-visaged servants, drilled to a phenomenal quietness, and keeping all their good spirits for the remoteness of the servants' hall, shut off by double doors and long passages. Saddened by that atmosphere of gloom, he entered his cousin's presence, and stood with her small cold hand in his, looking at the face which had changed so sorely from that vivid beauty which had shone upon him in the low light of the sinking sun on that summer evening not three months ago.

As he looked the memory of the bride's face came between him and the face of the widow, and for a moment or two he stood speechless. The clearly-cut features were pinched and sharpened, wasted by long nights of weeping and long days of silent regret. The dark eyes were circled by purple shadows, and the oval cheeks were sunken and pallid. All the colour and richness of that southern beauty had vanished, as if some withering blight had passed over the face.

"It was very good of you to think of me before you left Dorchester," she said, gently.

She pushed forward a chair for her cousin, before she sat down; and Theodore seated himself opposite to her with the wicker work-table between them. He wondered a little to see that satin-lined receptacle gorged with bright coloured silks, and pieces of unfinished embroidery; for it seemed to him that there was a touch of frivolity in this light ornamental needle-work which hardly harmonized with her grief-stricken countenance.

"You could not suppose that I should leave without seeing you," he said; "I should have come here weeks ago, only——"

"Only you wanted to give me time to grow calm, to teach myself

to look my trouble straight in the face," she said, interpreting his thought. "That was very thoughtful of you. Well, the storm is over now. I am quite calm, as you see. I dare say some people think I am *getting over it*. That is the usual phrase, is it not? And so you are going to the Bar, Theodore. I am glad of that. You are clever enough to make a name as my father did. It will be slow work, I suppose; but it will be a field worthy of your ambition, which a solicitor's office in a market-town never would be."

"I have felt the want of a wider field for a long time; and I shall feel more interest in a barrister's work. But I hope you don't think I am conceited enough to expect to get on as well as your father."

"I don't know about that. I think you must know you are a clever man. I have been wishing to see you for a long time, Theodore, only I was like you—I wanted to give myself time to be calm. I want to talk to you about—the murderer."

"Yes. Have you heard anything? Has there been any discovery?"

"Nothing. The offer of a reward has resulted in nothing—not one little scrap of information. The London detective gave up the business and went back to town a week after the funeral, having obtained only negative results. The police hereabouts are creatures without an idea; and so unless something is done, unless some clever brain can solve the riddle, the wretch who killed my husband may go down to the grave unpunished."

"It is hard that it should be so," said Theodore, quietly, "yet it is an almost impossible case. There is not a single indication so far to put one on the track—not one little clue."

"Not for these dull-brained, mechanical discoverers, perhaps; but for you or me, Theo,—for us who loved him there ought to be light. Think, what a strange murder it was. Not for gain, remember. Had it been the hand of a burglar that shot him, I could understand the difficulty of tracing that particular criminal among all the criminal classes. But *this* murder, which seems utterly motiveless, must have been prompted by some extraordinary motive. It was not the act of a maniac; a maniac must have left some trace of his presence in the neighbourhood. A maniac could not have so completely eluded the police on the alert to hunt him down. There must have been some indication."

"Put madness out of the question, Juanita, what then?"

"Hatred, Theodore. That is the strongest passion in the human mind—a savage hatred which could not be satisfied except with the brightest life that it had the power to destroy—a relentless hatred—not against him, not against my beloved. What had he done in all his good life that any one upon this earth should hate *him?* But against us—against my father and mother and me—the usurpers, the owners of Cheriton Manor; against us who have thrust ourselves upon the soil which that wicked race held so long. Oh, Theodore,

I have thought and thought of this, till the conviction has grown into my mind—till it has seemed like a revelation from God. It was one of that wicked family who struck this blow."

"One of your predecessors—the Strangways? Is that what you mean, Nita?"

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"My dear Juanita, it is too wild an idea. What, after your father has owned the estate nearly a quarter of a century? Why should the enemy wait all those years—and choose such a time?"

"Because there never before was such an opportunity of striking a blow that should bring ruin upon us. My father's hope of making his son-in-law his successor in the peerage was known to a good many people. It may easily have reached the ears of the Strangways."

"My dear girl, the family has died off like rotten sheep. I doubt if there are any survivors of the old race."

"Oh, but families are not obliterated so easily. There is always some one left. There were two sons and a daughter of the old squire's. Surely one of those must have left children."

"But, Juanita, to suppose that any man could hate the purchaser of his squandered estate with a hatred malignant enough for murder is to imagine humanity akin to devils."

"We are akin to devils," cried Juanita, excitedly. "I felt that I could rejoice as the devils rejoice at human suffering if I could see my husband's murderer tortured. Yes, if he were tied against a tree, as Indian savages tie their sacrificial victims—tied against a tree and killed by inches, with every variety of torture which a hellish ingenuity can suggest, I would say my litany, like those savages, my litany of triumph and content. Yes, Theodore, we have more in common with the devils than you may think."

"I cannot see the possibility of murder, prompted by such an inadequate motive," said Theodore, slowly, remembering, as he spoke, how Churton had suggested that the crime looked like a vendetta.

"Inadequate! Ah, that depends, don't you see. Remember, we have not to deal with good people. The Strangways were always an evil race. Almost every tradition that remains about their lives is a story of wrong-doing. And think how small a wound may be deadly when the blood has poison in it beforehand. And is it a small thing to see strangers in a home that has been in one's family for three centuries? Again, remember that although nothing throve on the Cheriton Estate while the Strangways held it—or at any rate not for the last hundred years of their holding—no sooner was my father in possession than the luck changed. Quarries were developed; land that had been almost worthless became valuable for building. Everything has prospered with him. And think of them outside—banished for ever, like Adam and Eve out of Paradise. Think of them with hate and envy gnawing their hearts."

"There would be time for them to get over that feeling in four and twenty years. And when you talk about *them*, I should like to know exactly whom you mean. I assure you the general idea is that they have all died off. That is to say, all of the direct line."

"It is upon that very subject I want to talk to you, Theodore. Would you like to do me a service, a very great service?"

"Nothing would make me happier."

"Then will you try to find out all about the Strangways—if they are really all gone, or if there are not some survivors, or a survivor, of the last squire's family? If you can do that much it will be something gained. We shall know better what to think. When I heard that you were going to live in London, it flashed into my mind that you would be just the right person to help me, and I knew how good you had been to me always, and that you *would* help. London is the place in which to make your inquiries. I have heard my father say that all broken lives—all doubtful characters—gravitate towards London. It is the one place where people fancy they can hide."

"I will do everything in my power to realize your wish, Juanita. I shall be a solitary man with a good deal of leisure, so I ought to succeed, if success be possible."

They were silent for some few minutes, Juanita being exhausted with the passionate vehemence of her speech. She took up a piece of embroidery from the basket, and began, with slow, careful stitches, upon the petal of a dog rose.

"I am glad to see you engaged upon that artistic embroidery," said Theodore, presently, for the sake of saying something.

"That means perhaps that you wonder I can care for such frivolous work as this," she said, interpreting his recent thought, when his eyes first lighted on her satin-lined basket with its rainbow-hued silks. "It seems inconsistent, I dare say; but this work has helped me to quiet my brain many a time when I have felt myself on the brink of madness. These slow regular stitches, the mechanical movement of my hand as the flowers grow gradually, stitch by stitch, through the long melancholy day, have quieted my nerves. I cannot read. Books give me no comfort, for my eyes follow the page while my mind is brooding on my own troubles. It is better to sit and think quietly, while I work. It is better to face my sorrow."

"Have you been long alone?"

"No. It is only three weeks since Lady Jane went back to Swanage; and she comes to see me two or three times a week. My father and mother come as often. You must not think I am deserted. Every one is very good to me."

"They have need to be."

Again there was a brief interval of silence, and then Juanita closed her basket, and lifted her earnest eyes to her cousin's face.

"You know all about the Strangways?" she inquired.

"I have heard a good deal about them from one and another. People who live in the country have long memories, and are fond of talking of the lords of the soil, even when the race has vanished from the land. I have heard elderly men tell their after-dinner stories about the Strangways at my father's table."

"You know the family portraits at Cheriton?"

"The pictures in the hall? Yes. I have wondered sometimes that your father should have kept them there—effigies of an alien race."

"I hate them," exclaimed Juanita, shuddering. "I always had an uncomfortable feeling about them, a feeling of strange cold eyes looking at us in secret enmity; but now I abhor them. There is a girl's face—a cruel face—that I used rather to admire when I was a child, and sometimes dream about; and on the last night but one—of—my happy life—I looked at that picture with Godfrey, and told him my feeling about that face, and he told me the pitiful story of the girl whose portrait we were looking at. The creature had a sad life, and died in France, poor and broken-hearted. Two hours later I heard a strange step upon the terrace—while Godfrey and I were sitting in the library—a stealthy, creeping step, coming near one of the open windows, and then creeping away again. When we looked out there was no one to be seen."

"And this was the night before—Sir Godfrey's death?"

"Yes. I told my father about it—after—after my trouble; and when he questioned the gardeners he discovered that footprints had been seen by one of them on the damp gravel the morning after I heard that ghost-like step. They were strange footprints the man was sure, or he would not have noticed them—the prints of a shoe with a flat heel—not of a large foot,—but they were not very distinct, and he went over them with his roller, and rolled them out, and thought no more about the fact till my father questioned him. The next day was dry and warm, as you know, and the gravel was hard next night. There were no footprints seen—afterwards."

"Did the gardener trace those marks beyond the terrace—to the avenue, for instance?"

"Not he. All he did was to roll them out with his iron-roller."

"They suggest one point—that the murderer may have been lurking about on the night before the crime."

"I am sure of it. That footstep would not have frightened me if there had been no meaning in it. I felt as a Scotchman does when he has seen the shadow of the shroud round his friend's figure. It is a point for you to remember, Theodore; if you mean to help me."

"I do mean to help you."

"God bless you for that promise," she cried, giving him her hand, "and if you want any further information about the Strangways there is some one here who may be useful. Godfrey's old bailiff, Jasper Blake, lived over ten years at Cheriton. He only left there

when the Squire died, and he almost immediately entered the service of Godfrey's father. If you can stay till the evening I will send for him, and you can ask him as many questions as you like."

"I will stay. There is a moon rather late in the evening, and I shall be able to get back any time before midnight. But, Juanita, as an honest man, I am bound to tell you that I believe you are following an *ignis fatuus*—you are influenced by prejudices and fancies, rather than by reason."

CHAPTER X.

"The snow
Of her sweet coldness hath extinguished quite
The fire that but even now began to flame."

Theodore Dalbrook, a sensible, hard-headed man of business, was like a puppet in his cousin's hands. She told him to toil for her, and he deemed himself privileged to be allowed so to labour. She put him upon that which, according to his own conviction, was an absolutely false track, and he was compelled to follow it. She bade him think with her thoughts, and he bent his mind to hers.

Yes, she was right perhaps. It was a vendetta. Lord Cheriton had lived all these years hemmed round with unseen, unsuspected foes. They had not burned his ricks, or tried to burn his dwelling-house; they had not slandered him to the neighbourhood in anonymous letters; they had not poisoned his dogs or his pheasants. Such petty malevolence had been too insignificant for them. But they had waited till his fortunes had reached their apogee, till his only child had grown from bud to flower and he had wedded her to an estimable young man of patrician lineage and irreproachable character. And, just when fate was fairest the cowardly blow had been struck—a blow that blighted one young life, and darkened those two other lives sloping towards the grave, the lives of father and mother, rendered desolate because of their daughter's desolation.

Mastered by that will which was his law, the will of the woman he loved, Theodore began to believe as she believed, or at least to think it just possible that there might be amongst the remnant of the Strangway race a man so lost and perverted, so soured by poverty, so envenomed by disgraces and mortifications, eating slowly into the angry heart, like rust into iron, that he had become at last the very incarnation of malignity—hating the man who had prospered while he had failed, hating the owner of his people's forfeited estate as if that owner had robbed them of it—hating with so passionate a

malevolence that nothing less than murder could appease his wrath. Yes, there might be such a man. In the history of mankind there have been such crimes. They are not common in England, happily; but among the Celtic nations they are not uncommon.

"My first brief," mused Theodore, with a grim smile, as he walked up and down the drawing-room while his cousin was writing a memorandum requesting the bailiff's presence. "It is more like a case entrusted to a detective than submitted to counsel's opinion; but it will serve to occupy my mind while I am eating my dinners. My poor Juanita! Will her loss seem less, I wonder, when she has discovered the hand that widowed her?"

He dined with his cousin at a small round table in the spacious dining-room which had held so many cheerful gatherings in the years that were gone: the sisters and their husbands, and the sisters' friends; and Godfrey's college friends; and those old friends of the neighbourhood who seemed only a little less than kindred, by reason of his having known them all his life. And now these two were sitting here alone, and the corners of the room were full of shadows. One large circular lamp suspended over the table was the only light, the carving being done in a serving-room adjoining.

Juanita was too hospitable to allow the meal to be silent or gloomy. She put aside the burden of her grief and talked to her cousin of his family and of his own prospects; and she seemed warmly interested in his future success. It was but a sisterly interest, he knew, frankly expressed as a sister's might have been; yet it was sweet to him nevertheless, and he talked freely of his plans and hopes.

"I felt stifled in that old street," he told her. "A man must be very happy to endure life in a country town."

"But you are not unhappy, Theodore?" she interrupted, wonderingly.

"Unhappy—no, that would be too much to say, perhaps. You know how fond I am of my father. I was glad to work with him, and to feel that I was useful to him; but that feeling was not enough to reconcile me to the monotony of my days. A man who has home ties—a wife and children—may be satisfied in that narrow circle; but for a young man with his life before him it is no better than a prison."

"I understand," said Juanita, eagerly. "I can fully sympathize with you. I am very glad you are ambitious, Theodore. A man is worthless who is without ambition. And now tell me what you will do when you go to London. How will you begin?"

"I shall put up at the Inns of Court Hotel for a few days while I look about for a suitable set of chambers, and when I have found them and furnished them, and brought my books and belongings from Dorchester, I shall sit down and read law. I can read while I am qualifying for the Bar. I shall go on reading after I have qualified. My life will be to sit in chambers and read law books until

some one brings me business. It hardly sounds like a brilliant career, does it?"

"All beginnings are hard," she answered, gently. "I suppose my father went through just the same kind of drudgery when he began?"

"Well, yes, he must have gone upon the same lines, I fancy. There is no royal road."

"And while you are studying law and waiting for briefs, will you have time to look after my interests?"

"Yes, Juanita. Your interest shall be my first thought always. If it can make you happier to discover your husband's murderer——"

"Happier! It is the only thing that can reconcile me to the burden of living."

"If it is for your happiness, you need not fear that I shall ever relax in my endeavours. I may fail,—indeed, I fear I must fail,—but it shall not be for the lack of earnestness or perseverance."

"I knew that you would help me," she said, fervently, holding out her hand to him across the table.

Dinner was over, and they were alone, with the grapes and peaches of the Priory hothouses, which were not even second to those of Cheriton, unheeded upon the table before them.

"Blake is in the house by this time, I dare say," said Juanita presently. "Would you like to see him here, and shall I stay, or would you rather talk to him alone?"

"I had better take him in hand alone. It is always hard work to get straight answers out of that sort of man, and any cross current distracts him. His thoughts are always ready to go off at a tangent."

"He knows all about the Squire's children. He can give you any particulars you want about them."

The butler came into the room five minutes afterwards with the coffee, and announced the bailiff's arrival.

Juanita rose at once, and left her cousin to receive Jasper Blake alone.

He came into the room with rather a sheepish air. He was about sixty, young looking for his age, with a bald forehead, and stubbly iron grey hair, and a little bit of whisker on each sunburnt cheek. He had the horsey look still, though he had long ceased to have anything to do with horses beyond buying and selling cart-horses for the home farm, and occasionally exhibiting a prize animal in that line. He was a useful servant, and a thoroughly honest man, of the old-fashioned order.

"Mr. Blake, I want you to give me some information about old friends of yours. I have a little business in hand, which indirectly concerns the Strangway family, and I want to be quite clear in my own mind as to how many are left of them, and where they are to be found."

The bailiff rubbed one of his stunted whiskers meditatively, and shook his head.

"There was never many of 'em to leave, sir," he said, grumpily, "and I don't believe there's any of 'em left anywheres. There seems to have been a curse upon 'em, for the last hundred years. Nothing ever throve with them. Look at what Cheriton is now, and what it was in their time."

"I didn't know it in their time, Mr. Blake."

"Ah, you're not old enough; but your father knew the place. He did business for the old Squire—till things got too bad—mortgages, and accommodation bills, and overdrawn accounts at the bank, and such like, and your father washed his hands of the business—a long-headed gentleman, your father. He can tell you what Cheriton was like in the Squire's time."

"Why do you suppose the Strangways are all dead and gone?"

"Well, sir, first and foremost it's fifteen years and more since I've heard of any of 'em, and the last I heard was about as bad as bad could be."

"What was that last report?"

"It was about Master Reginald—that was the eldest son, him that was colonel of a Lancer regiment, and married Lord Dangerfield's youngest daughter. I remember the bonfires on the hills out by Studlands just as if it happened yesterday, but it's more than forty years ago, and I was a boy in the stables at fourteen shillings a week."

"Reginald, the elder son, colonel of Lancers, married Lord Dangerfield's daughter—about 1840," wrote Theodore in a pocket-book which he held ready for taking notes.

"What was it you heard about him?" he asked.

"Well, sir, it was Mr. de Lacy's servant that told me. He'd been somewhere in the south with his master where there was gambling—a place where the folks make a regular trade of it. It's a wonderful climate, says Mr. de Lacy's man, and the gentry go there for their health, and very often finish by shooting themselves, and it seems Colonel Strangway was there. He'd come over from Corsica, which it seems was in the neighbourhood—where he'd left his poor wife all among brigands and savages—and he was at the tables day and night, and he had a wonderful run of luck, so that they called him the king of the place, and it was who but he? Howsoever the tide turned suddenly, and he began losing, and he lost his last sixpence, in a manner of speaking regular cleaned out, Mr. de Lacy's man said; and by-and-by there comes another gentleman, a Jewish gentleman from Paris, rolling in money, and playing for the sake of the science, and able to hold out where another man must have given in; and in a week or two *he* was the king of the place, and the Colonel was nowhere, just living on tick at the hotel, and borrowing a fiver from Mr. de Lacy or any other old acquaintance

whenever he had the chance, and making as much play as he could with two or three cart wheels, where he used to play with hundred-franc pieces. And so it went on, and he cut up uncommon rough when anybody happened to offend him, and there was more than one row at the hotel or in the gardens—they don't allow no rows in the gambling rooms,—and just as the season was coming to an end the Colonel went off one afternoon to catch the boat for Corsica. The boat was to start after dark from Nice, and there was a lot of traffic in the port, but not as much light as there ought to have been, and the Colonel missed his footing in going from the quay to the boat, and went to the bottom like a plummet. Some people thought he made away with himself on purpose, and that the one sensible thing he did was to make it look like accident, so as not to vitiate the insurance on his life, which Lord Dangerfield had taken care of, and had paid the premiums ever since the Colonel began to go to the bad. Anyhow, he never came up again alive out of that water. His death was published in the papers: 'Accidentally drowned at Nice.' I should never have known the rights or the wrongs of it if Mr. de Lacy hadn't happened to be visiting here soon afterwards."

"Did Colonel Strangway leave no children?"

"Neither chick nor child."

"Do you know if his widow is still living?"

"No, sir. That is the last I ever heard of him or his."

"What about the younger brother?"

"I believe he must be dead too, though I can't give you chapter and verse. He never married, didn't Mr. Frederick—not to my knowledge. He went on board a man-of-war before he was fifteen, and at five and twenty he was a splendid officer and as fine a young man as you need wish to see; but he was too fond of the bottle. China was the ruin of him, some folks said, and he got court-marshalled out there, not long after they sacked that there Summer Palace there was so much talk about; and then he contrived to pass into the mercantile marine, which was a come-down for a Strangway, and for a few years he was one of their finest officers, a regular dare-devil; could sail a ship faster and safer than any man in the service; used to race home with the spring pickings of tea, when tea wasn't the cheap muck it is now, and when there weren't no Suez Canal to spoil sport. But he took to his old games again, and he got broke again, broke for drunkenness and insubordination; and then he went and loafed and drank in Jersey—where, it's my belief, he died some years ago."

"You have no positive information about his death?"

"I can't say that I have."

"There was one daughter, I think?"

"Yes, there was a daughter, Miss Eva. I taught her to ride. There wasn't a finer horsewoman in Dorsetshire, but a devil of a temper—the real Strangway temper. I wasn't surprised when I

heard she'd married badly; I wasn't surprised when I heard she'd run away from her husband."

"Did she leave any children?"

"No, not by him."

"But afterwards—do you know if there were children?"

"I can't say that I do. She was living in Boulogne when I last heard of her, and somebody told me afterwards that she died there."

"That's vague. She may be living still."

"I don't think that's likely. It's more than ten years—ay, it's nearer fifteen—since I heard of her death. She was not the kind of woman to hide her light under a bushel for a quarter of a century. If she were alive I feel sure we should have heard of her at Cheriton. Lord! how fond she was of the place, and how proud she was of her good looks and her old name, and how haughty and overbearing she was with every other young woman that ever came in her way."

"She must have been a remarkably disagreeable young person, I take it."

"Well, not altogether, sir. She had a taking way when she wasn't in her tantrums, and she was very good to the poor people about Cheriton. *They* doated upon her. She never quarrelled with them. It was with her father she got on worst. Those two never could hit it off. They were too much alike. And at last, when she was close upon seventeen, and a regular clipper, things got so bad that the Squire packed off the governess at an hour's warning. She was too young and silly to manage such a pupil as Miss Strangway, and it's my belief she sided with her in all her mischief, and made things worse. He turned her out of doors neck and crop, and a week afterwards he took his daughter up to London and handed her over to an English lady, who kept a finishing school somewhere abroad, at a place called Losun."

"At Lausanne, I think."

"Yes, that was the name. She was to stay there for a year, and then she was to have another year's schooling in Paris to finish her; but she never got to Paris, didn't Miss Eva. She ran off from Lausanne with a lieutenant in a marching regiment, and her father never saw her face again. He had no money to give her if she had married ever so well, but he took a pride in striking her name out of his will all the same."

"What was her husband's name?"

"Darcy—Tom Darcy. He was an Irishman, and I've heard he treated her very badly."

"Do you know how long it was after her marriage that she left him?"

"I only know when I heard they were parted, and that was six or seven years after she ran away from Lausanne."

"How long was that before the Squire's death and the sale of the estate?"

"Nearly ten years, I should say."

"That makes it about thirty-four years ago?"

"Yes, that's about it."

Theodore noted down the date in his book. He had heard all these things before now—loosely, and in a disjointed fashion—never having been keenly interested in the vicissitudes of the Strangways.

"Who was the man who took her away from her husband?"

"God knows," said Jasper. "None of us at Cheriton ever heard. We fancied he must have been a Frenchman, for she was heard of afterwards—a good many years afterwards—at Boulogne. Our old Vicar saw her there the year before he died—it must have been as late as sixty-four or sixty-five, I fancy,—a wreck, he said. He wouldn't have recognized her if she hadn't spoken to him, and she had to tell him who she was. I heard him tell my old master all about it, one summer afternoon at the Vicarage gate, when Sir Godfrey had driven over to see him. Yes, it must have been as late as sixty-five, I believe."

"Five years after Lord Cheriton bought the estate?"

"About that."

"Do you remember the name of Miss Strangway's governess? Of course, you do, though."

The bailiff rubbed his iron-grey whisker with a puzzled air.

"My memory's got to be like a corn-sieve of late years," he said, "but I ought to remember her name. She was at Cheriton over four years, and I only wish I had a guinea for every time I've sat behind her and Miss Strangway in the pony chaise. She was a light-hearted, good-tempered young woman, but she hadn't bone enough for her work. She wasn't up to Miss Strangway's weight. Let me see now—what was that young woman's name?—she was a good-looking girl, sandy, with a high colour and a freckled skin. I ought to remember."

"Take a glass of claret, Mr. Blake, and take your time. The name will come back to you. Have you ever heard of the lady since she left Cheriton?"

"Never—she wasn't likely to come back to this part of the world after having been turned out neck and crop, as she was. What was the name of the man who saw the apple fall?—Newton—that was it, Sarah Newton. Miss Strangway used to call her Sally. I remember that."

"Do you know where she came from, or what her people were?"

"She came from somewhere near London, and it's my opinion her father kept a shop; but she was very close about her home and her relatives."

"And she was young, you say?"

"Much too young for the place. She couldn't have been five and twenty when she left; and a girl like Miss Strangway, a motherless girl, wanted some one older and wiser to keep her in order."

"Had the Squire's wife been long dead at that time?"

"She died before I went to service at Cheriton. Miss Eva couldn't have been much above seven years old when she lost her mother."

Theodore asked no more questions, not seeing his way to extracting any further information from the bailiff. He had been acquainted with most of these facts before, or had heard them talked about. The handsome daughter who ran away from a foreign school with a penniless subaltern—the Strangway temper, and the pitched battles between the spendthrift father and the motherless unmanageable girl—the life-long breach, and then a life of poverty and an untimely death in a strange city, only vaguely known, yet put forward as a positive and established fact. He had heard all this: but the old servant's recollections helped him to tabulate his facts—helped him, too, with the name of the governess, which might be of some use in enabling him to trace the story of the last of the Strangways.

"If there is any ground for Juanita's theory, I think the man most likely to have done the deed would be the Colonel of Lancers, supposed to be drowned at Nice. If I were by any means to discover that the story of the drowning was a mistake, and that the Colonel is in the land of the living, I should be inclined to adopt Juanita's view of the murder."

He encouraged the bailiff to take a second glass of claret, and talked over local interests with him for ten minutes or so, while his dog-cart was being brought round; and then, Mr. Blake having withdrawn, he went to the drawing-room where Juanita was sitting at work by a lamp-lit table, and wished her good night.

"Did you find Jasper intelligent?" she asked, eagerly.

"Very intelligent."

"And did you find out all you wanted from him?"

"Not quite all. He told me very little that I did not know before; but there were one or two facts that may be useful. Good night, Nita, good night, and good-bye."

"Not for long," she answered. "You will spend Christmas at home, of course."

"Yes, I shall go home for the Christmas week, I suppose."

"You will have something to tell me by that time, perhaps. You will be on the track."

"Don't be too sanguine, Nita. I will do my uttermost."

"I am sure you will. Ah, you don't know how I trust you, how I lean upon you. God bless you, Theodore. You are my strong rock. I, who never had a brother, turn to you as a sister might. If you can do this thing for me—if you can avenge his cruel death——"

"If—what then, Juanita?" he asked, paling suddenly, and his eyes flaming.

"I shall honour—esteem you—as I have never done yet; and you

know I have always looked up to you, Theodore. God bless and prosper you. Good night."

Her speech, kind as it was, fell upon his enthusiasm like ice. He was holding both her hands, almost crushing them unawares in his vehemence. Then his grip loosened all at once, he bent his head, gently kissed those slender hands, muttered a husky good night, and hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XI.

"The God of love—*ah, benedicite!*
How mighty and how great a Lord is he!"

A WEEK later Theodore Dalbrook was established in chambers on the second floor of No. 2, Ferret Court, Temple.

Ferret Court is one of the few places in the Temple which have not been improved and beautified out of knowledge within the last thirty years. The architect and the sanitary engineer have passed by on the other side, and have left Ferret Court to its original shabbiness. Its ceilings have not been elevated, or its windows widened, nor has the Early-English stone front replaced the shabby old brickwork. Its time has not come. The rooms are small and low, the queer old closets where generations of lawyers have kept their goods and chattels are dark and redolent of mice. The staircases are rotten, the heavy old ballusters are black with age, and the deep old window-seats are set in windows of the early Georgian era. The chambers suited Theodore, first because they were cheap, and next because the sitting-room, which was at the back, commanded a good view of the river. The bedroom was a tolerable size, and there was a dressing-room just big enough to hold bath and boots. He furnished the rooms comfortably, with solid old-fashioned furniture, partly consisting of surplus articles sent from the old house in Dorchester, and partly of his own purchases in London. The rooms were arranged with a sober taste which was by no means inartistic, and there was just enough bright colouring in the Algerian portières and a few handsome pieces of Oriental crockery to relieve the dark tones of old oak and Spanish mahogany. Altogether the chambers had the established look of a nest which was meant to last through wind and weather, a shelter in which a man expected to spend a good many years of his life.

He had another reason for choosing those old rooms in Ferret Court in preference to chambers in any of those new and commodious houses in the courts that had been rebuilt of late years. It was in this house that James Dalbrook had begun his legal career;

it was here, on the ground floor, that the future Lord Cheriton had waited for briefs nearly forty years ago; and it was here that fame and fortune had first visited him, a shining apparition, bringing brightness into the shabby old rooms, irradiating the gloomy old court with the glory of triumphant ambition, hopes suddenly realized, the consciousness of victory. James Dalbrook had occupied those dingy chambers fifteen years, and long after he became a great man, and he had gone from them almost reluctantly to a spacious first-floor in King's Bench Walk. He had enjoyed the reputation of a miser at that period of his life. He was never known to give a dinner to a friend; he lived in a close retirement which his enemies stigmatized as a hole-and-corner life; he was never seen at places of amusement; he never played cards, or bet upon a race. Socially he was unpopular.

Theodore had taken all the preliminary steps, and had arranged to read with a well-known special pleader. He was thoroughly in earnest in his determination to succeed in this new line. He wanted to prove to his father that his abandonment of the Dorchester office was neither a caprice nor a folly. He was even more in earnest in his desire to keep his promise to his cousin Juanita.

Almost his first act upon arriving in London had been to go to Scotland Yard in the hope of finding the detective who had been sent to Cheriton, and his inquiries there were so far successful that he was able to make an appointment with Mr. Churton for the next day but one.

He had talked with Churton after the adjourned inquest, and had heard all that the professional intellect had to offer in the way of opinion at that time; but he thought it worth his while to find out if the detective's ideas had taken any new development upon subsequent reflection, and also to submit Juanita's theory to professional consideration. He was not one of those amateurs who think that they are cleverer at a trade than the man who has served a long apprenticeship to it.

"Have you thought anything more about the Cheriton murder since last July, Mr. Churton?" he asked; "or has your current work been too engrossing to give you time for thought?"

"No, sir. I've had plenty of other cases to think about, but I'm not likely to forget such a case as that at Cheriton, a case in which I was worsted more completely than I have been in anything for the last ten years. I've thought about it a good bit, I can assure you, Mr. Dalbrook."

"And do you see any new light?"

"No, sir. I stick pretty close to my original opinion. Sir Godfrey Carmichael was murdered by somebody that bore a grudge against him; and there's a woman at the bottom of it."

"Why a woman? Might not a man's hatred be deadly enough to lead to murder?"

"Not unless he was egged on by a woman; or had been jilted by

a woman; or was jealous of a woman; or thought he had a woman's wrongs to avenge."

"Is that what your experience teaches you, Mr. Churton?"

"Yes, Mr. Dalbrook, that is what my experience teaches me."

"And you think it was an enemy of Sir Godfrey's who fired that shot?"

"I do."

"Do you think the enemy was a woman—the hand that pulled the trigger a woman's hand?"

"No, I don't. A woman couldn't have been about the place without being remarked—or got clear off, as a man might."

"There are the servants. Could the murderer be one of them?"

"I do not think so, sir. I've taken stock of them all—stables—lodges—everywhere. I never met with such a superior set of servants. The person at the west lodge is a lady bred and born, I should say. She gave me a good deal of information about the household. I consider her a remarkably intelligent woman, and I know she is of my opinion as to the motive of the murder."

"And yet if I tell you that Sir Godfrey had not an enemy in the world?" said Theodore, dwelling on the main point, and not particularly interested in what the highly-intelligent Mrs. Porter might have said upon the subject.

"I should tell you, sir, that no man can answer for another man. There is something in the lives of most of us that we would rather keep dark."

"I don't believe there was any dark spot in Sir Godfrey's life. But what if there were an enemy of Lord Cheriton's—a man who has been a judge is in a fair way to have made enemies—a foe vindictive enough to strike at him through his son-in-law, to smite him by destroying his daughter's happiness? She is his only child, remember, and all his hopes and ambitions centre in her."

"Well, Mr. Dalbrook, if there was such a man he would be an out-and-out blackguard."

"Yes, it would be a refinement of cruelty—a Satanic hate; but such a man might exist. Remember the murder of Lord Mayo—one of the wisest and most beloved of India's rulers. The wretch who killed him had never seen his face till the day of the murder. He thought himself unjustly condemned, and he killed the man who represented the Power which condemned him. Might not some wrong-headed Englishman have the same vindictive feeling against an English judge?"

"Yes, it is possible, no doubt."

"My cousin, Lady Carmichael, has another theory."

Theodore explained the positions of Lord Cheriton and the race that preceded him as owners of the soil, and Juanita's suspicion of some unknown member of the Strangway family; but the detective rejected this notion as unworthy of professional consideration.

"It is like a young lady to get such an idea into her head," he said. "If the estate had changed hands yesterday—well, even then I shouldn't suspect the former owners of wanting to murder the purchaser's son-in-law; but when you reflect that Lord Cheriton has been in peaceful possession of the property for more than twenty years the idea isn't worth a moment's thought. What put such a fancy into the lady's head, do you think, Mr. Dalbrook?"

"Grief! She has brooded upon her loss until her sorrow has taken strange shapes. She thinks that it is her duty to help in bringing her husband's murderer to justice. She has racked her brains to discover the motive of that cruel crime. She has conjured up the image of incarnate hatred, and she calls that image by the name of Strangway. I have pledged myself to act upon this idea of hers as if it were inspiration, and the first part of my task will be to find out any surviving member of Squire Strangway's family. He only left three children, so the task ought not to be impossible."

"You don't mean, sir, that you are going to act upon the young lady's theory?"

"I do mean it, Mr. Churton, and I want you to help me; or at any rate to give me a lesson. How am I to begin?"

He laid his facts before the detective, reading over the notes which he had elaborated from Jasper Blake's reminiscences and from his own recollection of various conversations in which the Strangways had figured.

Churton listened attentively, nodded, or shook his head occasionally, and was master of every detail after that one hearing.

"Jersey is not a large place. If I were following up this inquiry I should go first for the son who is supposed to have died in Jersey," he said, when he had heard all. "I should follow that line as far as it goes, and then I should hunt up the particulars of the Colonel's death, the gentleman who was drowned at Nice. If any Strangway had a hand in the business, it must have been one of those two, or the son of one of them. But I tell you plainly, Mr. Dalbrook, that I don't put any faith in that poor lady's notion—no, not that much," said the detective, snapping his fingers contemptuously.

"Yet it was you yourself who first mooted the idea of a vendetta."

"So it was; but I didn't mean a vendetta on such grounds as that. An estate changes hands, and—after twenty years and more—the original holders try to murder the son-in-law of the purchaser! That won't hold water, sir. There's not enough human passion in it. I've had to study humanity, Mr. Dalbrook. It's been a part of my profession, and perhaps I've studied human nature closer than many a philosopher who sits in his library and writes a book about it. Now, there's no human nature in that notion of Lady Carmichael's. A man may be very savage because his spendthrift father has squandered his estate, and he may feel savage with the

lucky man who bought and developed that estate, and may envy him in his enjoyment of it—but he won't nurse his wrath for nearly a quarter of a century, and then give expression to his feelings all at once with a revolver. *That* isn't human nature."

"How about the exception to every rule? Might not this be an exceptional case?"

"It might, of course. There's no truer saying than that fact is stranger than fiction; but, for all that, this notion of Lady Carmichael's is a young lady's notion, and it belongs to fiction and not to fact. I wouldn't waste my time upon it, if I were you, Mr. Dalbrook."

"I must keep my promise, Mr. Churton. I am obliged to you for your plain speaking, and I am inclined to agree with you; but I have made a promise, and I must keep it."

"Naturally, sir; and if in the course of your inquiries I can be of any use to you, I shall be very glad to co-operate."

"I rely on your help. Remember there is a handsome reward to be earned by you if you can bring about the discovery of the murderer. My part in the search will count for nothing."

"I understand, sir. That's a stimulus, no doubt; but I hardly wanted it. When a case baffles me as this case has done, I would work day and night, and live on bread and water for a month, to get at the rights of it. Good day. You've got my private address, and you can wire me anywhen."

"You're a Sussex man, Mr. Churton, I fancy?"

"Born in the village of Bramber."

Theodore left Waterloo the following evening, and landed at St. Heliers on the following morning an hour or so before noon. He landed on the island as an absolute stranger, and with the vaguest idea of the work that lay before him, but with the determination to lose no time in beginning that work. He sent his valise to Brett's Hotel, and he walked along the pier to the town, and inquired his way to the Police Office. He was not going in quest of information about a member of the criminal classes; but the man he was hunting had been a notorious drunkard, and it seemed to him that in a small settlement like St. Heliers such a man would have been likely to attract the attention of the police at some stage of his downward career.

The first official whom Theodore interrogated had never heard of the name of Strangway in the island; but an elderly inspector appearing presently upon the scene, and listening attentively to the conversation, made a suggestion.

"You say the gentleman was fond of drink, sir, and in that case he'd be likely to have his favourite public, where they'd know all about him. Now, there are not so many taverns in St. Heliers where a sea-captain, and a broken-down gentleman, would care to

enjoy himself. He wouldn't go to a low place, you see; and he wouldn't fancy a swell place. It would be some house betwixt and between, where he'd be looked up to a bit—and it would be something of a seafaring place, you may be sure. There ain't so many but what you could look in at 'em all, and ask a few questions, and get on the right track. I can give you the names of two or three of the likeliest."

"I shall be much obliged," said Theodore. "I think it's a capital idea."

The inspector wrote down the names of three taverns, tore the leaf out of his pocket-book, and handed it to Mr. Dalbrook.

"If you don't hear of him at one of those, I doubt if you'll hear of him anywhere on the island," he said. "Those houses are all near the pier and the quays. It won't take you long to go from one to the other. 'The Rose and Crown,' that's where the English pilots go; 'La Belle Alliance,' that's a French house with a *table d'hôte*. They've got a very good name for their brandy, and it's a great place for broken-down gentlemen. You can get a good dinner for half-a-crown with *vin ordinaire* included."

"I'll try the 'Belle Alliance' first," said Theodore. "It sounds likely."

"Yes, I believe it's about the likeliest," replied the inspector.

The "Belle Alliance" fronted the quay, and stood at the corner of a shabby old street. There was a church close by, and a dingy old churchyard. Everything surrounding the "Belle Alliance" was shabby and faded, and its outlook on the dirty quay and the traffic of ugly waggons and uglier trucks, hogsheads and lumber of all kinds, was depressing in the extreme.

But the tavern itself had an air of smartness which an English tavern would hardly have had in the same circumstances. The interior was gay with much looking-glass, and a good deal of tarnished gilding. There were artificial flowers in sham silver vases on the tables, and there was a semi-circular counter at one end of the restaurant, behind which a ponderous divinity, still youthful, but expansive, sat enthroned, her sleek, black hair elaborately dressed, her forehead ornamented with accroche-cœurs, and a cross of Jersey diamonds sparkling upon her swan-like throat, which was revealed by one of those open collars which are dear to the lower order of French women. There was a row of tables in front of the windows which looked towards the quay, and there was a long, narrow table in the middle of the room, laid for the *table d'hôte déjeuner;* but as yet the room was empty, save for one young man and woman, of the tourist order, who were whispering and tittering over a *café complet* at one of the small tables furthest from the buffet.

Theodore went straight to the front of the buffet, and saluted the lady enthroned there.

"Madame speaks English, no doubt?"

"Oh, yes, but a leetle. I am live long time in Jairsey, where is more English as French peoples."

After this sample speech it seemed to him that he might get on better with the lady in her native tongue, so he asked her for a cup of coffee in her own language, and stood at the counter while he drank it, and talked to her of indifferent matters, she nothing loth.

"You have lived a long time in Jersey," he said. "Does that mean a long time in this house?"

"Except one year I have lived in this house all the time, nine years. I was only nineteen when I undertook the position of *dame du comptoir*. I could not have undertaken such a responsibility with a stranger, but the proprietor is my uncle, and he knew how to be indulgent to my youth and inexperience."

"And then, a handsome face is always an attraction. You must have brought him good fortune, madame."

"He is kind enough to say so. He found it difficult to dispense with my services while I was absent, though he had a person from London who had been much admired at the Crystal Palace."

"And you, madame,—was it a feminine caprice, the desire for change, which made you abandon your uncle during that time?"

"I left him when I married," replied the lady, with a profound sigh. "I returned to him a heart-broken widow."

"Pray forgive me for having recalled the memory of your grief. I am a stranger in this place, and I am here on a somewhat delicate mission. My first visit is to this house, because I knew I should find intelligence and sympathy here rather than among my own countrymen. I am fortunate in meeting with a lady who has occupied an important position at St. Heliers for so long a period. I have strong reasons for wishing to discover the history of a gentleman who came to the Island some years ago—I do not know how many—after having been unfortunate in the world. He was a naval man."

"My poor husband was a naval man," sighed the *dame du comptoir*.

"A pilot, no doubt," thought Theodore.

Theodore's manner, which was even more flattering than his words, had made a favourable impression, and the lady was disposed to be confidential. She glanced at the clock, and was glad to see that it was only twenty minutes past twelve. There was time for a little further conversation with this handsome, well-bred Englishman, before the habitués of the "Belle Alliance" came trooping in for the half-past twelve o'clock *table d'hôte*. Already the atmosphere was odorous with fried sole and *ragout de mouton*.

"The gentleman of whom I am in quest is reported to have died on the Island," he continued; "but this is very likely to have been a false report, and it is quite possible that Captain Strangway may still——"

"Captain Strangway," echoed the woman, with an agitated air.

"Yes, I see you know all about him. You can help me to find him."

"Know him!" cried the woman. "I should think I did know him, to my bitter cost. Captain Strangway was my husband."

"Good Heavens!"

"He was my husband. The people will be here in a few minutes. If monsieur will do me the honour to step into my sitting-room, we can talk without interruption."

CHAPTER XII.

"The comfort is, you shall be called to no more payments, fear no more tavern bills."

The *dame du comptoir* beckoned a waiter, and delegated some portion of her supreme authority to him for the next quarter of an hour. She constituted as it were a Regency, and gave her subordinate command over her wine and liqueur bottles, her *fine champagne*, Bass and Guinness; and then she ushered Theodore Dalbrook into a very small sitting-room at the back of the counter, so small indeed that a large looking-glass, a porcelain stove, two arm-chairs, and one little table left hardly standing room.

Theodore followed with a sense of bewilderment. He had told himself that the Island of Jersey was a world so small that he could not have much difficulty in tracing any man who had lived and died there within the last ten years; but accident had been kinder to him than he had hoped.

The lady seated herself in one of the ruby velvet arm-chairs, and motioned him to the other.

"You have given me a shock, monsieur," she said. "My friends in the island know that my marriage was unfortunate, and they never mention my husband. He is forgotten as if he had never been. I sometimes fancy that year of my life was only a troubled dream. Even my name is unchanged. I was called Mdlle. Coralie before I married. I am called Madame Coralie now."

"I am sorry to have caused you painful emotion, madame, but it is most important to me to trace the history of your husband's later years, and I deem myself very fortunate in having found you."

"Is it about a property, a fortune left him, perhaps?" exclaimed Coralie, with sudden animation, her fine eyes lighting up with hope.

"Alas, no. Fortune had nothing in reserve for your unlucky husband."

"Unlucky, indeed, but not so unlucky as I was in giving my heart to him. I knew that he was a drunkard. I knew that he had been turned out of the navy, and out of the mercantile marine on account of that dreadful vice,—but he—he was very fond of me, poor fellow, and he swore that he would never touch a glass of brandy again as long as he lived, if I would consent to marry him. He did turn over a new leaf for a time, and kept himself sober and steady, and would hang over that counter for a whole evening talking to me, and take nothing but black coffee. I thought I could reform him. I thought it would be a grand thing to reform a man like that, a gentleman bred and born, a man whose father had been a great landowner, and whose family name was one of the oldest in England. He was a gentleman in all his ways. He never forgot himself even when he had been drinking. He was a gentleman to the last. Such a fine-looking man too. While he was courting me and kept himself steady he got back his good looks. He looked ten years younger, and I was very proud of him the day we were married. He had taken a house for me, a nice little house on the hill near the Jesuits' College, with a pretty little garden, and I had furnished the house out of my savings. I had saved a goodish bit since I came to Jersey, for my uncle is a generous man, and my situation here is a good one. I had over two hundred pounds in hand after I paid for the furniture—these chairs were in my drawing-room,—and he hadn't much more than the clothes he stood upright in, poor fellow. But I wouldn't have minded that if he had only kept himself steady. I was prepared to work for him. I knew I should have to keep him. He was too much of a gentleman to be able to work except in his profession, and that was gone from him for ever; so I knew it was incumbent on me to work for both, and I thought that by letting our drawing-room floor in the season, and by doing a little millinery all the year round—I'm a good milliner, monsieur—I thought I could manage to keep a comfortable home, without touching my two hundred pounds in the Savings Bank."

"You were a brave, unselfish girl to think so."

"Ah, sir, we are not selfish when we love. I was very fond of him, poor fellow. I had begun with pitying him, and then he was a thoroughbred gentleman—he was *vielle roche*, monsieur, and I have always admired the noblesse. I am no Republican, moi. And he had such winning ways when he was sober—and he was not stupid as other men are when he was drunk—only more brilliant—*la tête montée—hélas, comme il pétillait d'esprit*—but it was his brain that he was burning—*that* was the fuel that made the light. But how is it you interest yourself in him, monsieur?" she asked, suddenly, fixing him with her sharp black eyes. "You say it is not about property. You must have a motive, all the same."

"I have a motive, but my interest is not personal. I am acting

for some one who now owns the Strangway estate, and who wishes to know what has become of the old family."

"What can it matter to any one?" asked Madame Coralie, suspiciously. "They had lost all their money—of the land that had been theirs not an acre was left. What business is it of any one's what became of them when they were driven from their birth-place. Oh, how my poor Frederick hated the race that had possessed itself of his estate! There was nothing too bad for them. When he was excited he would rave about them awfully—a beggarly lawyer, a black-hearted scoundrel, that is what he would call Lord—Lord Sherrington, when he had been drinking."

Theodore's brow grew thoughtful. How strange this seemed, almost like a confirmation of Juanita's superstitious horror of the banished race. Perhaps it was not unnatural that an unlucky spendthrift—ruined, disgraced—should hate the favourite of fortune who had ousted him; but not with a hate capable of murder, murder in cold blood, the murder of a man who had never injured him even indirectly.

"Your husband has been dead some years, I conclude?" he said, presently.

"Three years and a half on the tenth of last month."

"And you had a troublesome time with him, I fear?"

"Trouble seems a light word for what I went through. It was like living in hell—there is no other word—the hell which a madman can make of all around him. For a few weeks we went on quietly—he seemed contented, and I was very happy, thinking I had cured him. I watched him as a cat watches a mouse, for fear he should go wrong again. He never went out without me; and at home I did all that a woman can do to make much of the man she loves, studying him in everything, surrounding him with every little luxury I could afford, cooking dainty little meals for him, petting him as if he had been an idolized child. He seemed grateful, for the first few weeks, and almost happy. Then I saw he was beginning to mope a little. He got low-spirited, and would sit over the fire and brood—it was cutting March weather—and would moan over his blighted life, and his own folly. 'If I had to begin over again,' he would say, 'ah, it would be different, Cora, it would be all different.'"

"He was not unkind to you?"

"No, he was never unkind, never. To the last, when he died raving mad with delirium tremens, he was always kind. It was seeing his madness and his ruin that made my trouble. He was violent sometimes, and threatened to kill me, but that was only when he didn't know me. I watched him moping for a week or so, and then one day, I was so unhappy at seeing him fret, that I thought I would do anything to cheer him. I fancied he missed the company in this house, and the cards and dominoes, and billiards—

for before we were married he used to dine at the *table d'hôte* two or three times a week, and used to be in the *café* or in the billiard-room every night."

"How did he manage to live without a profession, and without ostensible means?"

Madame shrugged her shoulders.

"God knows. I think he used to write to his old friends—his brother officers in the navy or the merchant service—and he got a little from one and a little from another. He would borrow of any one. And there was a small legacy from his mother's sister which fell in to him soon after he came to Jersey. That was all gone before I married him. He hadn't a penny after he'd paid the marriage fees. Well, monsieur, seeing him so down-hearted I proposed that he should go down to the 'Belle Alliance' and have a game at billiards and see his old friends. 'You needn't take any money,' I said, 'my uncle will treat you hospitably.' He seemed pleased at the idea, and he promised to be home early; but just as he was leaving the house he turned back and said there was a little bill of thirty shillings he owed to a bootmaker in the street round the corner, and he didn't like to pass the man's shop without paying. Would I let him have the money? It was the first money he'd asked me for since we were married, and I hadn't the heart to say no, so I went to my little cash-box and took out three half sovereigns. I told him that the money meant a week's housekeeping. 'I give you nice little dinners, don't I, Fred?' I said, 'but you've no idea how economical I am.' He laughed and kissed me, and said he hated economy, and wished he had a fortune for my sake, and he went down the street whistling. Well, sir, perhaps you can guess what happened. He came home at three o'clock next morning mad with drink, and then I knew he was not to be cured. I went on trying all the same, though, till the last; and I lived the life of a soul in torment. I was fond of him to the last, and saw him killing himself inch by inch, and saw him die a dreadful death, one year and three days after our wedding day. He spent every penny I had in the world, and my uncle helped us when that was gone, and I came back to this house after his funeral a broken-hearted woman. All my furniture which I'd worked for was sold to pay the rent, and the doctors, and the undertaker. I just saved the furniture in this room, and that is all that is left of four hundred and seventy pounds and of my married life."

"You were indeed the victim of a generous and confiding heart."

"I was fond of him to the last, monsieur, and I forgave him all my sufferings; but let no woman ever marry a drunkard with the hope of reforming him."

"Were you quite alone in your martyrdom; had your husband no relatives left to help him on his dying bed?"

"Not one. He told me he was the last of his race. He must

have had distant relations, I suppose; but his elder brother was dead, and his sister."

"You are sure his brother was dead?"

"Yes; he fell into the water at Nice on a dark evening, when he was going on board the steamer for Corsica. I have got the paper with the account of his death."

"Will you show me that paper, and any other documents relating to your husband's family? I know I have no right to ask such a favour; but all I can say is that I shall be very grateful if you will so far oblige me."

The *table d'hôte* was in full swing in the adjoining room, as testified by the clattering of plates and the jingle of knives and forks, and a subdued murmur as of a good many confidential conversations carried on simultaneously.

"You want to see my poor Fred's private papers," said the widow, meditatively. "That's a good deal to ask; not that there are any secrets in them that can hurt anybody above ground. The Colonel is dead, and his sister. My husband was the last. But I can't understand why anybody should want to pry into a dead man's papers, unless there's property hanging to them."

She looked at Theodore suspiciously, as if she could not divest herself of the idea of a fortune having turned up somehow, unexpectedly; a fortune to which her dead husband was entitled.

"There is no property, I assure you. It is a question of sentiment, not of money."

"You're a lawyer, I suppose?" said Coralie, still suspiciously.

She supposed that it was only lawyers who went about prying into the affairs of the dead.

"I am a lawyer; but the business which brings me to Jersey is not law business."

"Well, I don't see how any harm can come to me through your seeing my husband's papers. There's not many to see—a few letters from the Colonel, and two or three from a lawyer about the legacy, and a dozen or so from old friends, refusing or sending him money. You've spoken kindly to me, and I've felt that you could sympathize with me, though you're a stranger—so—well—you may see his letters, though it hurts me to touch anything that belonged to him, *le pauvre homme*."

She took a bunch of keys from her pocket, unlocked the little secretaire, and from one of the drawers produced a bundle of old letters and cuttings from newspapers, which she handed to Theodore Dalbrook, and then seated herself opposite to him, planted her elbows on the table, and watched him while he read, keenly on the alert for any revelation of his purpose which might escape him in the course of his reading. She had not altogether relinquished that idea of an inheritance, or legacy—property of some kind—involved in this endeavour to trace a dead man's history. The explanation

which Theodore had given had not convinced her. He had confessed himself a lawyer, and that was in itself enough to made her doubt him.

The cuttings from old newspapers belonged to the days when Frederick Strangway had commanded a war-ship, to the days when he fought in the Chinese war. Some of them recorded the honour he had won for himself at different stages of his career, and it was only natural that these should have been carefully preserved by him in all his wanderings. But there were other cuttings—the report of the court martial that broke him—the trial in which he stood accused of having risked the loss of his ship with all hands aboard by his dissolute habits—a shameful and a painful story. This record of his folly had been kept by that strange perversity of the human mind which makes a man secrete and treasure documents which must wring his heart and bow his head with shame every time he looks at them. There were other extracts of a like shameful kind—reports of street rows, two cases of drunken assault in San Francisco, one of a fight in Sydney harbour. He had kept them all as if they had been words of praise and honour.

The letters were most of them trivial—letters from brother officers of the past—"very sorry to hear of your embarrassments," "regret inability to do more than the enclosed small cheque," "the numerous claims upon my purse render it impossible for me to grant the loan requested," the usual variations upon the old tune in which a heavily-taxed *pater familias* fences with the appeal of an unlucky acquaintance. They were such letters as are left by the portmanteauful among the effects of the man for whom the world has been too hard.

Theodore put aside all this correspondence after a brief glance, and there remained only four letters in the same strong, resolute hand—the hand of Reginald Strangway.

The first in date was written on Army and Navy Club paper, and was addressed to Captain Strangway, R.N., H.M.S. *Cobra*, Hong Kong.

"My dear Fred,

"I have been sorry to leave your letter so long unanswered, but I am bothered about a great many things. My wife has been out of health for nearly a year. The doctors fear her chest is affected, and tell me I ought to get her away from England before the winter. As things have been going very badly with me for a long time I shall not be sorry to cut this beastly town, where the men who have made their money, God knows how, are now upon the crest of the wave, and by their reckless expenditure have made it impossible for a man of small means to live in London—if he wants to live like a gentleman. Everything is twice as dear as it used to be when I was a subaltern. My wife and I are pigging in

two rooms on a second floor in Jermyn Street. I live at my club, and she lives on her relatives, so that we don't often have to sit down to a lodging-house dinner of burnt soles and greasy chops, but the whole business is wretched. She has to go to parties in a four-wheel cab, and I can hardly afford the risk of a rubber. So I shall be uncommonly glad to cut it all, and settle in some out-of-the-way place where we can live cheap, and where the climate will suit Millicent.

"My first idea was Algiers, but things are still rather unsettled there, as you know. Lambton, of the Guards, has been shooting in Corsica lately, and came home with a glowing account of the climate and the cheapness of the inns, which are roughish, but clean and fairly comfortable; so I have determined on Corsica. We shall be within a day's sail of Nice, so not utterly out of reach of civilization, and we can live there how we like, without entertaining a mortal, or having to buy new clothes. Millicent, who is fond of novelty, is in love with the notion, and Dangerfield has behaved very well to her, promising her an extra hundred a year if we will live quietly and keep out of debt, which, considering he is as poor as Job, is not so bad. As for my creditors, they are pretty quiet since I got Aunt Belle's legacy, part of which I divided among 'em as a sop to Cerberus. They'll have to be still quieter when I'm settled in Corsica.

"Of course, you heard of that wretched woman's kicking over the traces altogether at last. God knows what will become of her. I believe she had been carrying on rather badly for some time before Tom found out anything. You know what an ass he is. However, he got hold of a letter one evening—met the postman at the door and took her letters along with his own, and didn't like the look of one and opened it; and then there was an infernal row, and she just put on her bonnet and shawl, walked out of the house and called a cab and drove off. He followed in another cab, but it was a foggy night, and he lost her before she'd gone far. They were in lodgings in Essex Street, and it isn't easy for one cab to chase another on a foggy evening. She never went back to him, and he went all over London denouncing her, naming first one man and then another, but without any definite idea as to who the real man was. The letter was only a couple of sentences in Italian, which Tom only knew by sight—but he could see it was an appointment at a theatre, for the theatre and hour were named. She snatched the letter out of his hand while they were quarrelling, he told me, and chucked it into the fire, so he hasn't even the man's handwriting as evidence against him. It was a hand he had never seen before, he says. However, if he wants to find her no doubt he can do so, if he takes the trouble. I am sorry she should disgrace her family, and of course my wife feels the scandal uncommonly hard upon *her*. I can't say that I feel any pity for Tom Darcy. She had led a

wretched life with him ever since he sold out, and I don't much wonder at her being deuced glad to leave him. As it's Tom's business to shoot her lover, and not mine, I shan't mix myself up in the affair—and as for her, well, she has made her bed—— !"

There was more in the letter, but the rest was of no interest to Theodore.

The letter was dated January 3rd, 1851.

Three of the remaining letters were from Corsica, and contained nothing of any significance. A fourth was written at Monte Carlo, in answer to an appeal for money, and the date was twelve years later than the first. It was a gloomy letter, the letter of a ruined man, who had drunk the cup of disappointment to the dregs.

"To ask me for help seems like a ghastly joke on your part. Whatever your troubles may be, I fancy my lookout is darker than yours. My wife and I have vegetated on that accursed island for just a dozen years—it seems like a lifetime to look back upon. We just had enough to live upon while my father was alive, for, bad as things were at Cheriton, he contrived to send me something. Now that he is gone, and the estate has been sold by the mortgagees, there is nothing left for me—and we have been living for the last two years upon the pittance my poor Milly gets from her father. Whatever your cares may be, you don't know what it is to have a sick wife whose condition requires every luxury and indulgence, and to have barely enough for bread and cheese. If you were to see the house we live in—the tiled floors and the dilapidated furniture—and the windows that won't shut—and the shutters that won't keep to, and our two Corsican servants who look like a brace of savages, though they are good creatures in the main—you would be the last man to howl about your own troubles to me.

"I have been here a month, and with my usual diabolical luck. I am going home to-morrow—though perhaps I should be wiser if I went up into the hills behind Monaco and put a bullet through my brains. Millicent would be no worse off, God help her; for she is entirely dependent on her father, and I am only an incubus,—but she might think herself worse off, poor soul, so I suppose I had better go home.

"What am I thinking about? I can't afford to take refuge in the suicide's haven. My life is insured in the Imperial for £3,000, and poor old Dangerfield has been paying the premium ever since I began to go to the bad financially. It would be too hard upon him if I shot myself."

This was the last letter, and it was endorsed by the brother's hand.

"Reginald's last letter. I read in the *Times* newspaper of his being drowned at Nice ten days afterwards."

Theodore made a note of the dates of these letters, and the name

of the insurance office. Provided with these data it would be easy for him to verify the fact of Colonel Strangway's death, and thus bring the history of the two sons of old Squire Strangway to its dismal close in dust and darkness.

And thus would be answered Juanita's strange suspicion of the house of Strangway, answered with an unanswerable answer. Who can argue with Death? Is not that at least the end of all things—the road that leads no whither?

There remained for him only the task of tracing the erring daughter to her last resting-place. This would doubtless be more difficult, as a runaway wife living under a false name, and in all probability going from place to place, was likely to have left but faint and uncertain indications of her existence. But the first part of his task had been almost too easy. He felt that he could take no credit for what he had done, could expect no gratitude from Juanita.

He thanked Mrs. Strangway—*alias* Madame Coralie—for her politeness, and asked to be allowed to offer her a ten-pound note as a trifling acknowledgment of the favour she had done him. She promptly accepted this offering, and was only the more convinced that there was "property" involved in the lawyer's researches.

"If there is anything to come to *me* from any of his relations, I hope nobody will try to keep me out of it," she said. "I hope his friends will remember that I gave him my last shilling, and nursed him when there wasn't many would have stayed in the room with him?"

Theodore reiterated his assurance that no question of money or inheritance was involved in his mission to the Island, and then bade the Captain's widow a respectful adieu, and threaded his way through the avenue of tables to the door, and out of the garlic-charged atmosphere into the fresh autumnal air.

He stayed one night in Jersey, and left at eleven o'clock the next morning on board the *Fanny*, and slept in his chambers in Ferret Court, after having written a long letter to Juanita with a full account of all that he had learnt from the lips of the widow, and from the letters of the dead.

"I do not surrender my hope of finding the murderer," he wrote finally, "but you must now agree with me that I must look elsewhere than among the remnants of the Strangway race. They can prove an unanswerable *alibi*—the grave."

He went to the office of the Imperial next morning, saw the secretary, and ascertained that the amount of the policy upon Colonel Strangway's life had been paid to Lady Millicent Strangway, his widow, in April, 1863, after the directors had received indisputable evidence of his death.

"I remember the case perfectly," said the secretary. "The circumstances were peculiar, and there was a suspicion of suicide,

as the man had just left Monte Carlo, and was known to have lost his last napoleon, after a most extraordinary run of luck. There was some idea of disputing the claim; but if he did make away with himself he had contrived to do it so cleverly that it would have been uncommonly difficult to prove that his death was not an accident—more particularly as Lord Dangerfield brought an action against the steamboat company for wilful negligence in regard to their gangway and deficient lighting. The policy was an old one, too, and so it was decided not to litigate."

"There could be no doubt as to the identity of the man who was drowned at Nice, I conclude?"

"No, the question of identity was carefully gone into. Lord Dangerfield happened to be wintering at Cannes that year, and he heard of his son-in-law's death in time to go over and identify the body before it was coffined. You know how quickly burial follows death in that part of the world, and there would have been no possibility of the widow getting over from Ajaccio before the funeral. We had Lord Dangerfield's declaration that the body he saw at Nice was the body of Colonel Strangway, and we paid the £3,000 on that evidence. We have never had any reason to suspect error or foul play."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Thou takest not away, O Death?
Thou strikest—absence perisheth,
Indifference is no more;
The future brightens on our sight;
For on the past hath fallen a light
That tempts us to adore."

While Juanita clung with feverish intensity to the hope of discovering her husband's murderer Lord Cheriton seemed to be gradually resigning himself to the idea that the crime would go to swell the long list of undiscovered murders which he could recall within his own experience of life—crimes which had kept society expectant and on the alert for a month, and which had stimulated the police to unwonted exertions, finally to fade into oblivion, or to be occasionally cited as an example of the mysteriousness of human history.

He had offered a large reward, he had brought all his own trained intelligence to bear upon the subject; he had thought and brooded upon it by day and by night; and the result had been nil. A hand had been stretched out of the darkness to slay an

unoffending young man, in whose life his daughter's happiness had been bound up. That was the whole history of the murder. A shot heard in the night, a bullet fired out of the darkness with fatal aim.

Not one indication, not one suggestive fact had been discovered since the night of the murder.

"It is hopeless," said Lord Cheriton, talking over the calamity with Mr. Scarsdale, the Vicar of Cheriton and Testwick, adjoining parishes; "the crime and the motive of the crime are alike inscrutable. If one could imagine a reason for the act it might be easier to get upon the track of the murderer; but there is no reason that I can conceive for such a deed. It has been suggested to me that Sir Godfrey might have had a secret enemy—that his life might not have been as spotless as we think——"

"I will answer for it that he was never guilty of a dishonourable action, that he provoked no man's hatred by any unworthy act," interrupted the Vicar warmly.

He had been curate at Milbrook before he got the Cheriton living, and had lived for two years at the Priory while he prepared Godfrey Carmichael for Eton, so he claimed the right to vouch for the honour of the dead.

"There never was a whiter soul in mortal clay," said the Vicar.

"I am inclined to estimate his character almost as highly as you," replied Lord Cheriton, deliberately, "yet the straightest walker may make one false step—and there may have been some unfortunate entanglement at the University or in London——"

"I will never believe it. He may have been tempted—he may have yielded to temptation,—but if he erred, be sure he atoned for his error to the uttermost of his power."

"There are errors—seeming light to the steps that stumble—which cannot be atoned for."

"There was no such error in his youth. I looked in his face on his wedding day, Lord Cheriton, and it was the face of a man of unblemished life—a man who need fear no ghost out of the dead past."

"Well, you are right, I believe,—and in that case the murder is motiveless—the murder of a madman—a madman so profoundly artful in his lunacy as to escape every eye. By heaven, I wish we had the old way of hunting such a quarry—and that a leash of bloodhounds could have been set loose upon his track within an hour of the murder. *They* would have hunted him down—*their* instinct would have found him skulking and shivering in his lair; and we should have needed no astute detective primed with all the traditions of Scotland Yard. It would have been swift, sudden justice—blood for blood."

His dark grey eyes shone with an angry light as he walked up and down the spacious floor of the library, while the Vicar stood in

front of the fire, looking gravely into his clerical hat, and without any suggestion to offer.

"I hope Lady Carmichael is recovering her spirits," he said feebly, after a pause.

"She is not any happier than she was when her loss was a week old; but she keeps up in a wonderful way. I believe she is sustained by some wild notion that the murderer will be found—that she will live to see her husband's death avenged. I doubt if at present she has any other interest in life."

"But let us hope she will be cheered by the society of her husband's people. I hear that the Morningsides and the Grenvilles are to be at the Priory in November."

"Indeed! I have heard nothing about it."

"I was at Swanage yesterday afternoon, and took tea with Lady Jane. She was full of praises of Lady Carmichael's goodness, and her desire that all things at the Priory might be just as they had been in Sir Godfrey's lifetime. His brothers-in-law used to be invited for the shooting in November, and they were to be invited this year, on condition that Lady Jane would help to entertain them, and Lady Jane has consented gladly. So there will be a large family party at the Priory on this side of Christmas," concluded the Vicar.

"I am glad to hear it," said Lord Cheriton. "Anything is better for her than solitude; any occupation, if it be only revising a bill of fare, or listening to feminine twaddle, is better for her than idleness."

"Yes, there will be a houseful," pursued the Vicar; "Mrs. Grenville takes her nursery with her wherever she goes."

"And Mrs. Morningside is delighted to leave hers behind her."

"Yes, she is one of those mothers who are always telling people what paragons of nurses Providence has provided for their darlings, or how admirably their children are being brought up by a model governess," said the Vicar, who was severe upon other people's neglect of duty. "By-the-by, talking of mothers, I believe I saw Mrs. Porter's daughter the other day while I was in town."

"You *believe* you saw her?"

"Yes, I am not certain. A face flashed past me in the street one night, and when the face was gone it came upon me that it was Mercy Porter's eyes that looked at me for an instant in the gaslight. I was in a busy thoroughfare on the Surrey side of Westminster Bridge. I had been to hear Vansittart preach a mission sermon at a church near Walworth, and I was walking back to the West End. It was late on a Saturday night, and the road was full of costermongers' barrows, and the pavement was crowded with working people doing their marketing. I tried to overtake the girl whose face had startled me, but it was no use. She had melted into the crowd. I went back the whole length of

the street, hoping I might find her in front of one of the costers' stalls; but she must have turned into one of the numerous side streets, and it was hopeless to hunt for her there. Yet I should have been very glad to get hold of her."

"Is she much changed?"

'Changed! Yes. It was only the ghost of Mercy Porter that I saw. I should not have known her but for her eyes. She had fine eyes, do you remember, and with a great deal of expression in them. I think I should be safe in swearing to Mercy Porter's eyes."

"Did she look poor or ill?"

"She looked both—but the illness might be only hunger. She had that wan pinched look one sees in the faces of the London poor, especially in the women's faces."

"Have you told her mother?"

"No, I came to the conclusion that it would be giving the poor soul useless pain to tell her anything, having so little to tell. She knew years ago that Colonel Tremaine had deserted his victim, and that the girl had dropped through. God knows where: into the abyss that swallows up handsome young women who begin their career in West End lodgings and a hired brougham. If the mother were to go in quest of her, and bring her home here, it might be only to bring shame and misery upon her declining years. The creature may have fallen too low for the possibility of reformation, and the mother's last hours might be darkened by her sin. I would do much to rescue her—but I would rather try to save her through a stranger's help than by the mother's intervention."

Lord Cheriton continued his pacing to and fro, and did not appear particularly interested in the case of Mercy Porter. He had been much troubled by her flight from Cheriton, for the seducer was his own familiar friend, and he had felt himself in somewise to blame for having brought such a man to Cheriton. He told himself that he would not have had Tremaine inside his house had his own daughter been out of the schoolroom; and yet he had allowed the man to cross the path of the widow's only child, and to bring desolation and sorrow upon the woman whose life he had in somewise taken under his protection.

"There are people whose mission it is to hunt out that kind of misery," he said, after an interval of silence. "I hope one of those good women will rescue Mercy Porter. I think you have been wise in saying nothing to the mother. She has got over her trouble, and anything she might hear about the girl would only be a reopening of old wounds."

"She is a wonderful woman," replied the vicar; "I never saw such grief as hers when the girl ran away; and yet within a few months she had calmed down into the placid personage she has been ever since. She is a woman of very powerful mind. I

sometimes wonder that even at her age she can content herself with the monotonous life she leads in that cottage."

"Oh, she likes the place, I believe, and the life suits her," said Lord Cheriton, carelessly. "She had seen a good deal of trouble before she came here, and this was a quiet haven for her after the storms of life. I am very sorry the daughter went wrong," he added, with a sudden cloud upon his face. "*That* was a bitter blow; and I shall never forgive myself for having brought that scoundrel Tremaine here."

"He is dead, is he not?"

"Yes, he was killed in Afghanistan six years ago. He was a good soldier though he was a bad man. I dare say he made his being ordered off to India an excuse for leaving Mercy—left her with a trifle of money perhaps, and a promise of further remittances, and then let her drift. I told my lawyer to keep his eye upon her, if possible, and to establish her in some respectable calling if ever he saw the chance of doing so; but she eluded him somehow, as you know."

"Yes, you told me what you had done. It was like you to think even of so remote a claim upon your generosity."

"Oh, she belonged to Cheriton. I have cultivated the patriarchal feeling as much as I can. All who live upon my land are under my protection."

"Lady Cheriton has been a good friend to Mrs. Porter too."

"My wife is always kind."

Juanita accepted her cousin's account of what he had heard and read at St. Heliers, as the closing of his researches in the history of the Strangways. The sister's death in a shabby exile remained to be traced; but there was no light to be expected there; and Juanita felt that she must now submit to surrender her superstition about that evil race. It was not from them the blow had come. The murderer had to be hunted for in a wider range, and the quest would be more difficult than she had thought. She was not the less intent upon discovery because of this difficulty.

"I have all my life before me," she told herself, "and I have nothing to live for but to see his murderer punished."

It had been Juanita's especial desire that the Morningsides and the Grenvilles should be invited to the Priory just as they had been in Sir Godfrey's lifetime—that all the habits of the household should be as he had willed them when his bodily presence was there among them, as he was now in the spirit, to Juanita's imagination. She thought of him every hour of the day, and in all things deferred to his opinions and ideas, shaping the whole course of her life to please him who was lying in that dark resting-place where there is neither pain nor pleasure.

When November came, however, and with it the group of Grenvilles, nurses and nursery governess, and the Morningsides

with valet and maid, it seemed to Juanita as if the wild companions of Comus or a contingent from Bedlam had invaded the sober old Priory. Those loud voices in the hall, that perpetual running up and down and talking and laughing upon the staircase; the everlasting opening and shutting of doors; the roll of carriage-wheels driving up to the door a dozen times in a day; the bustle and fuss and commotion which two cheerful families in rude health can contrive to make in a house where they feel themselves perfectly at home—all these things were agonizing to the mourner who had lived in silence and shadow from the hour of her loss until now. Happily, however, Lady Jane was there to take all the burden off those weary shoulders; and Lady Jane in the character of a grandmother was in her very fittest sphere. Between her ladyship and the housekeeper all arrangements were made, and every detail was attended to without inflicting the slightest trouble upon Juanita.

"You shall see just as little of them all as you like, dear," said Lady Jane. "You can breakfast and lunch in your morning-room, and just come down to dinner when you feel equal to being with us, and then you will see the darlings at dessert. I know *they* will cheer you, with their pretty little ways. Such loving pets as they are too, and so full of intelligence. Did I tell you what Johnnie said yesterday, at lunch?"

"Yes, dear Lady Jane, you did tell me. It was very funny," replied Juanita, with a faint smile.

She could not tell that adoring grandmother that the children were a burden to her, and that those intelligent speeches and delightful mispronunciations of polysyllabic words which convulsed parents and grandparent seemed to add perceptibly to her own gloom. She pretended to be interested in Tom's letter from Eton with a modest request for a large hamper, and she made a martyr of herself by showing Susie picture-books, and explaining the pictures, or by telling Lucy her favourite Hans Andersen story, which never palled upon that young listener.

"Don't you think you would like a new one?" Juanita would ask.

"No, no, not a new one—the same, please. I want 'The Proud Darning Needle.'"

So the adventures of "The Proud Darning Needle" had to be read or related as the case might be.

Juanita took Lady Jane's advice and spent the greater part of every day in her morning-room, that room which had been Godfrey's den. It was further from the staircase than any other sitting-room, and the clatter and the shrill voices were somewhat modified by distance. The house-party amused themselves after their hearts' desire, and worked the horses with the true metropolitan feeling that a horse is an animal designed for locomotion, and that he can't have too much of it. Lady Jane was the most indulgent of deputy hostesses, and

spent all breakfast time in cutting sandwiches of a particularly dainty kind for her sons-in-law, so that they might be sustained between the luxurious home breakfast at nine, and the copious luncheon with which the cart met the shooters by appointment at half-past one. When the shooters had started there were the little Grenvilles to slave for; and Lady Jane spent another half-hour in seeing them off upon their morning constitutional, Lucy on her Shetland, and Johnnie, Susie, and Godolphin on their short little legs, with groom and nurses in attendance. There were so many wraps to be adjusted, so many injunctions to be given to nurses and groom, so many little pockets to be filled with gingerbreads and queen-cakes, while Mrs. Grenville looked on, and protested against grandmamma's infraction of hygienic rules. Dr. Dobson Drooce had said they must *never* eat between meals.

Juanita rarely appeared before afternoon tea, when she was generally installed in her own particular easy-chair by the fire, fenced round by a seven-leaved Indian screen, which was big enough to include a couple of small tables and a creepie stool, before the sisters-in-law came in from their afternoon drive, or the shooters dropped in after their day in the woods. There were no other guests than the sisters and their husbands; and it was an understood thing that no one else should be asked, unless it were Lord and Lady Cheriton, the Dalbrooks from Dorchester, or Mr. Scarsdale.

No one could have been sweeter than the young widow was to her visitors during the hours she spent with them, listening with inexhaustible patience to Jessica Grenville's graphic account of the measles as lately "taken" by her whole brood, with all the after consequences of the malady, and the amount of cod-liver oil and quinine consumed by each patient; pretending to be interested in Ruth Morningside's perpetual disquisitions upon smart people and smart people's frocks; and in every way performing her duty as a hostess.

And yet George Grenville was not altogether satisfied.

"I'll tell you what it is, Jess," he said to his wife one night, in the luxurious privacy of the good old-fashioned bedroom, seated on the capacious sofa in front of the monumental four-poster, with elaborately-turned columns, richly-moulded cornice, and heavy damask curtains; the kind of bedstead for which our ancestors gave fifty guineas, and for which no modern auctioneer can obtain a bid of fifty shillings; "I'll tell you what it is, Jess," repeated Mr. Grenville, frowning at the fire, "either your brother's widow gives herself confounded airs, or there is something in the wind."

"I'm afraid so, George," replied his wife, meekly.

"You're afraid of what? Why the deuce can't you be coherent? Afraid of her airs——"

"I'm afraid there is—something in the wind," faltered the sub-

missive lady. "I suppose it's the best thing that could happen to her, poor girl, for a nursery will be an occupation for her mind, and prevent her brooding on her loss; but this place would have been very nice for Tom all the same."

"I should think it would indeed, and he ought not to be swindled out of it," said Mr. Grenville, with a disgusted air. "I—I am surprised at your sister-in-law! I have always considered that there is a kind of indelicacy in a posthumous child. It may be a prejudice on my part, but I have always felt a sort of revulsion when I have heard of such creatures," and Mr. Grenville curled his lordly aquiline nose, and made a wry face at the jovial fire, blazing hospitably, heaped high with coals and wood, and roaring up towards the frosty sky.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Then through my brain the thought did pass,
Even as a flash of lightning there,
That there was something in her air,
Which would not doom me to despair;
And on the thought my words broke forth."

HARRINGTON DALBROOK was as keenly impressed with a sense of stupendous self-sacrifice in giving up his prospects in the Church as if the Primacy had only been a question of time; yet as his Divinity examination had twice ended in disappointment and a shamefaced return to the paternal roof-tree, it might be thought that, in his friend Sir Henry Baldwin's phraseology, he was very well out of it. Sir Henry was the average young man of the epoch, sharp, shallow, and with a strong belief in his own superiority to the human race in general, and naturally to a friend whose father plodded over leases and agreements in an old-fashioned office in a country town; but the two young men happened to have been thrown together at Oxford, where Sir Henry was at Christ Church while Harrington Dalbrook was at New; and as Sir Henry's ancestral home was within six miles of Dorchester, the friendship begun at the University was continued in the county town.

Sir Henry lived at a good old Georgian house called the Mount, between Dorchester and Weymouth. It was a red brick house, with a centre and two wings, a Corinthian portico of Portland stone, and a wide level lawn in front of the portico, that was brilliant with scarlet geraniums all the summer. There were no novelties in the way of gardening at the Mount, and there were never likely to be any new departures while Lady Baldwin held the reins of power.

She was known in the locality as a lady of remarkable "closeness," a lady who pared down every department of expenditure to the very bone. The gardens and shrubberies were always in perfect order, neat, trim, weedless; but everything was reduced to the minimum of outlay; there were no new plants or shrubs, no specimen trees, no innovations or improvements; there was very little "glass," and there were only two gardeners to do the work in grounds for which most people would have kept four or five.

The dowager was never ashamed to allude to the smallness of her jointure or to bemoan her son's college debts. She had two daughters, the younger pale, sickly, and insignificant; the elder tall and large, with a beauty of the showy and highly-coloured order, brown eyes, a complexion of milk and roses, freely sprinkled with freckles, and light wavy hair, which in a young woman of meaner station might have been called red.

The neighbourhood was of opinion that it was time for the elder Miss Baldwin to marry, and that she ought to marry well; but that important factor in marriage, the bridegroom, was not forthcoming. It was a ground of complaint against Sir Henry that he never brought any eligible young men to the Mount.

"My mother's housekeeping would frighten them away if I did," answered Henry, when hard driven upon this point. "The young men of the present day like a good dinner. There isn't a third-rate club in London where the half-crown house dinner isn't better than the food we have here—better cooked and more plentiful."

"Perhaps, if you helped mother a little things would be more comfortable than they are," remonstrated Laura, the younger sister, who generally took upon herself the part of Mentor. "You must know that her income isn't enough to keep up this place as it ought to be kept."

"I don't know anything of the kind. I believe she is hoarding and scraping for you two girls; but she'll find by-and-by that she has been penny wise and pound foolish, for nobody worth having will ever propose to Juliet in such a dismal hole as this," continued the baronet, scornfully surveying the old-fashioned furniture, which had never been vivified by modern frivolities, or made more luxurious by modern inventions.

"Juliet is not the beginning and end of our lives," replied Laura, sourly. "She has plenty of opportunities, if she were only capable of using them. I know her visiting costs a small fortune."

"A very small one," said Juliet; "I have fewer gowns than any girl I meet, and have to give smaller tips when I am leaving. The servants are hardly civil to me when I go back to a house."

"I dare say not," retorted Laura, "considering that you expect other people's maids to do more for you than your own maid would do, if you had one."

Juliet sighed, and shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"It is all very horrid and very sordid," she said, "and I wish I were dead."

"I don't go so far as that," replied Laura, "but I wish with all my heart you were married, and that mother and I could live in peace."

All this meant that the handsome Miss Baldwin was seven and twenty, and that although she had drunk the cup of praise from men and women, not one eligible man with place and fortune to offer had offered himself. Eligible men had admired and had praised and had flattered, and had ridden away, like the knight of old, and had married some other girl; a girl with money generally, an American girl sometimes. Juliet Baldwin hated the very name of Columbus.

For want of some one better to flirt with, Juliet had flirted with Harrington Dalbrook. He was her junior by two years, and on his first visit to the Mount had succumbed to her beauty, and to the charm of manners which somewhat exaggerated the progressive spirit of the smart world. Miss Baldwin was amused by her conquest, though she had no idea of allowing her acquaintance with her brother's friend to travel beyond the strictest limits of that state of things which our neighbours call "flirtage." But "flirtage" nowadays is somewhat comprehensive; and with Juliet it went so far as to allow her admirer to gratify her with offerings of gloves and flowers for her ball-dresses, when she was staying with friends in Belgravia, and the young man was taking a holiday in London.

It may be that the fascinations of this young lady had something to do with Harrington's failure to pass his Divinity examination, and with his subsequent renunciation of the Church of England for the wider faith of the naturalist and the metaphysician. He told his family that he had got beyond Christianity as it was understood by Churchmen, and set forth in the Thirty-nine Articles. He had gone from the river to the sea, as he explained it, from the narrow banked-in river of orthodoxy to the wide ocean of the new faith—faith in humanity—faith in a universal brotherhood—faith in one's self as superior to anything else in the universe, past or present. In this enlightened attitude he had grasped at Theodore's offer,—all the more eagerly, perhaps, because he had lately heard Juliet Baldwin's emphatic declaration apropos to nothing particular—that she would never marry a parson, and that the existence of a parson's wife in town or country seemed to her of all lives the most odious.

Would she take more kindly to a lawyer, he asked himself with a sinking heart. Would a country practice, life in an old-fashioned house in an old-fashioned market-town, satisfy her ambition? He feared not. If he wanted that radiant creature for his wife, he must exchange country for town, Dorchester for Lincoln's Inn Fields, and a house in Chester Street, or at least Gloucester Place. She had been used to Belgravia; but she might perhaps tolerate the neigh-

bourhood of Portman Square, the unaristocratic sound of Baker Street, the convenience of Atlas omnibuses, until he should be able to start his brougham.

Led on by this guiding star he told himself that what he had to do was to become learned in the law, particularly in the science, art, and mystery of conveyancing, which branch of a family practice he believed to be at once dignified and lucrative. He had to make himself master of his profession, to make his experiments upon the inferior clay of Dorsetshire—upon farmers and small gentry,—and then to persuade his father to buy him a London practice, an aristocratic London practice, such as should not call a blush to the cheek of a fashionable wife. He had met solicitors' wives who gave themselves all the airs of great ladies, and who talked as if the Bench and the Bar were set in motion and kept going by their husbands. Such a wife would Juliet be could he be so blessed as to win her.

The mild "flirtage," involving much tribute from the glover and the florist, the bookseller and the photographer, had been going on for nearly three years, and Harrington was tremendously in earnest. His sisters had encouraged him in his infatuation, thinking that it would be rather a nice thing to have a baronet as a family connection, and with a sneaking admiration for Sir Henry Baldwin's clubhouse manners, and slangy vocabulary, which had to be translated to them in the first instance by Harrington. They liked to be intimate with Miss Baldwin of the Mount, liked to see her smart little pony-cart waiting for an hour in front of the door in Cornhill, while the young lady prattled about her conquests, her frocks, and her parties, over the afternoon tea-table. True that she never talked about anybody but herself, except when she depreciated a rival belle; but the background of her talk was the smart world, and that was a world of which Janet and her sister loved to hear, albeit "plain-living and high-thinking" was their motto.

Sir Henry had a small hunting stud, and somewhat ungraciously allowed his elder sister an occasional mount, although, as he took care to impress upon her, he hated hunting women. For the pleasure of being in the young lady's society Harrington, who had no passion for horsemanship, became all of a sudden an ardent sportsman, borrowed his brother's cob, Peter, and was ultimately cajoled into the purchase of an elderly hunter, which was not quite quick enough for his friend Sir Henry.

"You don't mean hunting in the shires, so pace is not of so much consequence to you as it is to me," said the baronet. "Mahmud will carry you beautifully in our country, and he's as quiet as a sheep."

It is possible that this qualification of sheepishness was Mahmud's chief merit in Harrington's estimation. He was a black horse, and looked a good deal for the money. Sir Henry asked a hundred

guineas for him, and finally took his friend's acceptance for eighty, and this transaction was the first burden of debt which Harrington Dalbrook laid upon his shoulders after leaving the University. There had been college debts, and he had considerably exceeded a very liberal allowance, but his father had paid those debts to the last shilling; and one grave and stern remonstrance, with a few fatherly words of advice for the future, had been all that Harrington had been called upon to endure. But he did not forget that his father had warned him against the consequences of any future folly.

He felt rather uncomfortable when the black horse was brought to the door one hunting morning, and when his father happened to be in the front office, whence he could see the unknown animal.

"Where did you get that black horse, Harrington? Is it a hire?" he asked.

"No. The fact is I've bought him."

"Have you really? You must be richer than I gave you credit for being if you can afford to buy yourself a hunter. He looks a well-bred one, but shows work. I hope you didn't give much for him."

"No; I got him on easy terms."

"Not on credit, I hope."

"No; of course not. Sir Henry Baldwin sold him to me. I had saved a little out of my allowance, don't you know?"

"I'm very glad to hear it. And now be off and get a good day's sport, if you can. I shall want you to stick to your desk to-morrow."

Harrington took up his crop and hurried out, with a heart as heavy as lead. Never until to-day had he told his father a deliberate falsehood; but Matthew Dalbrook's searching look had frightened him out of his veracity. Only six months ago he had solemnly pledged himself to avoid debt, and he had broken his promise already, and owed eighty guineas for a beast which he could hardly hope to ride to hounds half a dozen times that season. He had involved himself for the beast's maintenance also, for his father's stables were full, and he had been obliged to put this new animal out at livery. He began to feel now that he had made a fool of himself; that he had been talked into buying a horse for which he had very little use.

He was jogging along in a low-spirited way when Sir Henry and his sister came up behind him at a sharp trot, whereat Mahmud gave a buck-jump that almost unseated him.

"The black looks a trifle fresh this morning," said Sir Henry. "You'll take it out of him presently. He suits you capitally, and he's well up to your weight. I was a little bit too heavy for him. You'll find him go like old boots."

Miss Baldwin, flushed with fresh air and exercise, looked more than usually brilliant. She was particularly amiable too; and when Harrington complained that he might not be able to give Mahmud enough work she offered to meet the difficulty.

"Send him over to me whenever you don't want him," she said, cheerily. "I'll make him handy for you."

The black gave another buck-jump, and Harrington felt inclined to lay him at her feet there and then. It was only the remembrance of that horrid slip of stamped paper, which had doubtless already been turned into cash by Sir Henry, which restrained him. He made up his mind to send Mahmud to Tattersall's at the end of the hunting season, to be sold without reserve. Juliet was riding a thorough-bred of which she was particularly fond, and was in very high spirits during the earlier part of the day; and in her lively society Harrington forgot the stamped paper, and gradually got on good terms with his horse. Mahmud had, indeed, no fault but age. He knew a great deal better how to keep near the hounds than his new master, and promised to be a valuable acquisition.

Harrington felt that he was distinguishing himself.

"The black suits you down to the ground," shouted Sir Henry, in the middle of a run, as he bucketed past his friend upon a pulling chestnut that had no respect for anybody, but clove his way through the ruck of riders like a battering-ram.

Sir Henry boasted of this animal that he never kicked a hound.

"Small thanks to him," said the Master, "for he kicks everything else. Hounds are not good enough for him. He nearly smashed my leg last Monday."

Harrington and Juliet did a good deal of quiet flirtation while the hounds were drawing a spinney rather late in the day, after a very good run and a kill. He told her all about the change in his position, and that he was to be his father's partner after a very short apprenticeship to the law.

"And you will live in Dorchester all your life," said Juliet, with an involuntary disgust.

"Not if I can help it. I don't mean to vegetate in a dead-alive provincial town. My father has a London connection already, and all his business wants is a little new blood. I hope to start chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields before I am many years older. And if I should marry," he continued, faltering a little, "I could afford to have a house in the West End—May Fair or Belgravia, for instance."

"Let it be May Fair, I beg—for your wife's sake, whoever she may be," exclaimed Juliet lightly. "A small house in Belgravia is an abomination. There is an atmosphere of invincible dreariness throughout that district which can only be redeemed by wealth and splendour. Perhaps it is because the place is on a level with Millbank. There is a flavour of the prison in the very air. Now, in Curzon or Hertford Street one breathes the air of the Park and Piccadilly, and one could exist in a bandbox. But really now, Harrington, joking apart, is it not rather wild in a young man like you—not out of paternal leading-strings—to talk about marriage and housekeeping?"

"One can't help thinking of the future. Besides, I am not so very young. I am four and twenty."

Juliet laughed a short cynical laugh, which ended in a sigh. She wondered whether he knew that she was three years older. Brothers are such traitors.

"I am four and twenty, and I feel that it is in me to succeed," concluded Harrington, with a comfortable vanity which he mistook for the self-confidence of genius.

The hounds drew blank, and the riders jogged homewards presently, by lane and common, Sir Henry keeping in front with one of his particular friends, and talking horse-flesh all the way, while Juliet and Harrington followed slowly side by side in earnest conversation.

He told her the history of his doubts, about which she did not care twopence—his "phases of faith and feeling," as he expressed it alliteratively. All she wanted to know was about his prospects—whether his father was as well off as he was said to be—she had heard people talk of him as a very rich man—those officious people who are always calculating other people's incomes, and descanting upon the little their neighbours spend, and the much that they must contrive to save. Juliet had heard a good deal of this kind of talk about Matthew Dalbrook, whose unpretentious and somewhat old-fashioned style of living gave an impression of reserved force—wealth invested and accumulating for a smarter generation. After all, perhaps, this young man, whose adoration was obvious, might not be a despicable *parti*. He might be pretty well off by-and-by, with a fourth, or better than a fourth, share of Matthew Dalbrook's scrapings,—and he was Lord Cheriton's cousin, and therefore could hardly be called a nobody.

Moved by these considerations, gravely weighed in the grave and grey November dusk, as they rode slowly between tall hedges, leafy still, but sear and red with the frost, Juliet felt inclined to let herself be engaged to her legal lover. She had been engaged to several people since she danced at her first ball. The bond did not count for very much in her mind. One could always slip out of that kind of thing, if it became inconvenient—one could manage with such tact that the man himself cried off, if one were afraid of being denounced as a jilt. Juliet and her lovers had always parted friends; and she wore more than one half-hoop of sapphires or of brilliants which had once played a solemn part as her engagement ring, but which had lapsed into a souvenir of friendship.

She was not so foolish as to hasten matters. She wanted to see her way before her; and she opposed Harrington's youthful ardour with the calm *savoirfaire* of seven and twenty. She called him a foolish boy, and declared that they must cease to be friends if he insisted upon talking nonsense. She would have to accept a very urgent invitation to Lady Balgowny Brigg's Castle in Scotland,

which she had been fencing with for years, if he made it difficult for them to meet. She threw him into a state of abject alarm by this stupendous threat.

"I won't say a word you can take objection to," he protested, "though I can't think why you should object."

"You forget that I have to study other people's ideas as well as my own," she answered gently. "I hope you won't be offended if I tell you that my mother would never speak to me again if I were engaged to you."

"No doubt Lady Baldwin has higher views," the young man said meekly.

"Much higher views. My poor mother belongs to the old school. She cannot forget that her grandfather was a marquis. It is foolish, but I suppose it is human nature. Don't let us talk any more about this nonsense. I like you very much as my brother's friend, and I shall go on liking you if you don't make me unhappy by talking nonsense."

Harrington took comfort from that one word "unhappy." It implied depths of feeling beneath that fashionable manner which held him at arm's length.

His spirits were somewhat dashed presently when Miss Baldwin looked with friendly contemptuousness at his neat heather-mixture coat and mud-stained white cords, and said carelessly,—

"It's a pity you don't belong to the Hunt. I fancy you would look rather nice in pink!"

"I—I—have so lately given up the idea of the Church," he faltered.

"Yes, but now you have given it up, you ought to be a member of the Hunt. Let my brother put you up at the next meeting. You are pretty sure of being elected, and then you can order your pink swallow-tail coat in time for the Hunt Ball in December."

Harrington shivered. That would mean two red coats—a hunting coat and a dancing coat. But this idea of twenty pounds laid out upon coats was not the worst. Twenty years ago, when he had ridden as hard and kept as good horses as any member of the Hunt, Matthew Dalbrook had resolutely declined the honour of membership. He had considered that a provincial solicitor had other work than to ride to hounds twice or three times a week. He might allow himself that pleasure now and again as an occasional relaxation in a hard-working professional life; but it was not for him to spend long days tearing about the country with the men of whose lands and interests he was in some wise custodian.

Theodore, who was at heart much more of a sportsman than his younger brother, had respected his father's old-fashioned prejudices, whatever line they took, and he had never allowed his name to be put up for the Hunt. He had subscribed liberally to the fund for

contingent expenses, as his father and grandfather had done before him; but he had been content to forego the glory of a scarlet coat, and the privilege of the Hunt buttons.

Harrington was not strong in that chief virtue of man, moral courage—the modern and loftier equivalent for that brute-courage which was the Roman's only idea of virtue. He felt that to acknowledge himself afraid to put up for election into the sacred circle of the Hunt lest he should offend his father, was to own by implication that a solicitor was not quite upon the social level of landed gentry and retired military men, the colonels and majors who form the chief ornament of the average Hunt club.

He murmured something to the effect that his father was not sporting, and wouldn't like him to waste too much time riding to hounds.

"What does that matter?" exclaimed Juliet. "You needn't go out any oftener because you are a member of the Hunt. There are men who appear scarcely half a dozen times in a season—men who have left the neighbourhood, and only come down for a run now and then for old sake's sake."

"I'll think it over," faltered Harrington. "Don't say anything to Sir Henry about it just yet."

"As you please; but I shan't dance with you at the ball if you wear a black coat," said Juliet, giving her bridle a sharp little shake and trotting forward to join her brother.

Mahmud, discomposed by that sudden start, gave a shambling elderly shy; Harrington pulled him up into a walk, and rode sulkily on, and allowed the other three riders to melt from him in the shades of evening.

Yes, she was beautiful exceedingly, and it would be promotion for a country solicitor to be engaged to a girl of such high standing; but he felt that his relations with her were hedged round with difficulty. She was expensive herself, and a cause of expense in others. She had spent the brightest years of her girlhood in visiting in country houses, where everything was on a grander scale than at the Mount. She had escaped from the barrenness of home to the mansions of noblemen and millionaires. She had strained all her energies towards one aim—to be popular, and to be asked to good houses. She had run the gauntlet of most of the best smoke-rooms in the three kingdoms, and had been talked about everywhere as the handsome Miss Baldwin. Yet her twenty-seventh birthday had sounded, and she was Miss Baldwin still. Half a dozen times she had fancied herself upon the eve of a great success—such a marriage as would at once exalt her to the pinnacle of social distinction—and at the last moment, as it seemed, the man had changed his mind. Some malicious mother of ugly daughters, or disappointed spinster, had told the eligible suitor "things" about Miss Baldwin—harmless little deviations from the rigid lines of maidenly etiquette, and the

suitor had cried off, fearing in his own succinct speech that he was going to be "had."

At seven and twenty, damaged by the reputation of failure—spoken of by the initiated as "that handsome girl Maltravers so nearly married, don't you know?"—Miss Baldwin felt that all hope of a great match was over. The funeral bell of ambition had tolled. She began to grow reckless; eat her dinner and took her dry champagne with a masculine gusto; smoked as many cigarettes as a secretary of legation; read all the new French novels, and talked about them unreservedly with her partners; was keen upon racing, and loved euchre and nap. She had half made up her mind to throw herself away upon the first wealthy cotton-spinner she might meet up in the North when she allowed herself to be touched by Harrington Dalbrook's somewhat boyish devotion, and began to wonder whether it might not be well for her to end her chequered career by a love match.

He was good-looking, much better educated than her brother and her brother's set, and he adored her. But, on the other hand, he was utterly without any claims to be considered "smart," and marriage with him would mean at best bread and cheese—or would at least mean nothing better than bread and cheese until they should both be middle-aged, and she should have lost all semblance of a waist. She had met solicitors' wives in society who wore diamonds, and who hurried away from evening parties because they were afraid of their horses catching cold—a carefulness which to her mind implied that horses were a novelty. She had even heard of solicitors making big fortunes; but she concluded that those were exceptional men, and she did not see in Harrington's character the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

Moved by these mixed feelings she allowed her lover to dangle in a state of uncertainty, and to spend all his spare cash upon those airy nothings which a young lady of Miss Baldwin's easy temper will accept from even a casual admirer. He knew the glover whose gloves she approved, and she occasionally told him the colour of a gown in advance, so that he might give her a suitable fan; and she had, furthermore, an off-hand way of mentioning any songs or new French novels she fancied.

"How very sweet of you," she would say, when the songs or the books appeared, "but it is really too bad—I must never mention anything I want in your hearing."

In spite of which wise remark the volatile damsel went on mentioning things, and being surprised when her wishes were gratified.

Miss Baldwin had met Lady Cheriton and her daughter both in town and country, and she and her people had been invited to garden parties at Cheriton Chase, but there had been no intimacy

between the families. Lady Cheriton shrank with an inward terror from a young lady of such advanced opinions as those which dropped like pearls and diamonds—or like toads and adders—according to the idea of her hearers—from Miss Baldwin's lips. Rumours of the young man's infatuation had been conveyed to the Priory by Lady Jane, and Harrington having gone to a family dinner at Milbrook was severely interrogated by his cousin.

"I hope there is no truth in what I have heard about you, Harry," she said confidentially, when he was sitting by her in her favourite corner within the shadow of the tall screen.

"I cannot answer that question until you tell me what you have heard," he replied with offended dignity.

"Something that would make me very unhappy if it were true. I was told you were getting entangled with that Miss Baldwin."

"I don't know why you should lay such an offensive emphasis upon the demonstrative pronoun. Miss Baldwin is beautiful and accomplished—and I—I am very proud of being attached to her."

"Has it gone so far as that, Harry? Are you actually engaged to her?"

"I am not actually engaged—she has a right to look a good deal higher—but I hope to make her my wife as soon as I am in a position to marry. She has given me so much encouragement that I don't think she will refuse me when the right time comes."

"But, my dear boy, she is always giving encouragement," exclaimed Juanita, anxiously.

Dear little Lucy Grenville was at the piano at the other end of the room playing an infantile arrangement of "Batti, batti," with fingers of iron, while mother and grandmother hung over her enraptured, and while the rest of the family party talked their loudest, so the cousins in the nook by the fire were not afraid of being overheard. "She is the most encouraging young lady I ever heard of. She has jilted and been jilted a dozen times, I believe——"

"You *believe*," echoed Harrington, with intense indignation; "I wonder that a girl of your good sense—in most things—can give heed to such idle gossip."

"Do you mean to say that she has not been jilted?"

"Certainly not. I admit that her name has been associated with the names of men in society. Silly people who write for the papers have given out things about her. She was to marry Lord Welbeck, Sir Humphrey Random—Heaven knows whom. A girl can't stay at big houses, and be admired as she has been, without all manner of reports getting about. But she is heartily sick of that kind of life, an endless web of unmeaning gaieties—that is what she herself called it. She will be very glad to settle down to a refined, quiet life—say, at the West End of London, with a victoria and brougham, and a small house, prettily furnished. One can furnish so prettily and so cheaply nowadays," concluded Harrington, with his mind's

eye upon certain illustrated advertisements he had seen of late—Jacobean dining-rooms—Sheraton drawing-rooms—for a mere song.

"I have heard people say that a reformed rake makes a good husband," said Juanita gravely, "but I have never heard that a reformed flirt makes a good wife."

"It is a shame to talk like that, Juanita. Every handsome girl is more or less a flirt. She can't help flirting. Men insist upon flirting with her."

"Does your father know you mean to marry Miss Baldwin?"

"No, I have never mentioned marriage to him. That will come in good time."

"And do you think he will approve?"

"I don't know. He is full of old-fashioned prejudices; but I don't see how he can object to my marrying into one of the county families."

"Don't you think it will be more like Miss Baldwin marrying out of one of the county families? I'm afraid from what I know of her brother and of old Lady Baldwin they would both want her to marry money."

"I suppose they have wanted that for the last four or five years," answered Harrington; "but it has not come off, and they must be satisfied if she chooses to marry for love."

"Well, I mustn't plague you any more, Harry. I see your heart is too deeply involved. I hope Miss Baldwin is a nicer girl than I have ever thought her. Girls are sometimes prejudiced against ach other."

"Occasionally," said Harrington, with satirical emphasis.

Lucy finished "Batti, batti," with a final chord in the bass and a final twirl in the treble, and was pronounced by her grandmother to have achieved wonders.

"Her time is a little uncertain," her mother remarked modestly; "but she has a magnificent ear. You should see her run to the window when there is an organ in the street."

"Yes, mother," cried Johnny, "but she never stays to listen unless there is a monkey on the top."

December came, and the Hunt Ball, at which more than one of Miss Baldwin's discarded or discarding admirers were present. The young lady looked very handsome in white satin and gauze, without a vestige of colour about her costume, and with her bodice cut with an audacity which is the peculiar privilege of dressmakers who live south of Oxford Street. The white gown set off Miss Baldwin's brilliant colouring, and looked well against the pink coats of her partners.

Harrington's dress suit had been a thing of beauty and a joy to him when it came home from his London tailor's, folded as no human hands could ever fold it again, enshrined in layers of tissue paper.

His sisters had helped to unpack the tailor's parcel, and had exclaimed at the extravagance of the corded-silk lapels and the satin sleeve-lining, and he had himself deemed that the archetypal coat could scarcely be more beautiful. Yet in this lurid ball-room he felt ashamed of his modest black twilled kersimere, and the insignificance of his white tie. The fox-hunters seemed to him to have it all their own way.

Miss Baldwin, however, was not unkind. She danced with him oftener than with any one else, especially after supper, when she became unconscientious and forgetful as to her engagements, and when her card was found to hold twice as many names as there were dances, together with a pencil sketch of a lobster waltzing with a champagne bottle, supplied by an unknown hand.

It was a cold, clear night, and youth and imprudence were going in couples to the garden behind the ball-room for coolness between the dances, and to look at the frosty stars, which in the enthusiasm of girlhood were accepted as a novelty. Harrington and Juliet were among those who ventured into the garden, the lady wrapped in a great white fur cloak, which made her look like a haystack in a snow-piece.

"Poor Doriscourt brought me this polar bear-skin," she said. "He shot the bear himself, at the risk of his life. I had asked him to bring me a skin when he came home."

"You asked him to give you something for which he must risk his life, and yet you make a great fuss at accepting Daudet's last novel from me," said Harrington, with tender reproachfulness.

"Ah, but you and Doriscourt are so different," exclaimed Juliet, rather contemptuously. "He was a great dare-devil, who would have come down hand-over-hand on a rope from the moon if there had been any way of getting up there."

"What has become of him?"

"Dead! He died a year ago—of drink, I'm afraid—lung-complaint complicated with del. trem. Poor fellow!"

She breathed a deep sigh, with that little pensive air which in a young lady of experience is as much as to say, "He was the only man I ever loved," and then she turned the conversation and talked of the supper and the champagne, which she sweepingly condemned.

Harrington hated that talk about the supper. He would have preferred taking of the stars like a schoolgirl, or Claude Melnotte, "wondering what star should be our home when love becomes immortal." To be told that the wine which now glowed in his veins and intensified his passion was not worth three-and-sixpence a bottle jarred upon his finer feelings. "You are such a cynic," he said. "I think I shall never get any nearer to your real self—for I know there is a heart under that mocking vein."

And then he repeated his simple story of a humble, devoted love—humble because the woman he loved was the loveliest among all

womankind, and because she occupied a higher plane than that on which his youth had been spent.

"But you have taught me what ambition means," he said. "Only promise to be my wife and you shall see that I am in earnest —that it is in me to succeed."

She had long been wavering—touched by his truthfulness, his boyish devotion—very weary of life at the Mount, where the mother scolded and the sister sneered, where the underfed and underpaid servants were frankly disobliging, where her brother rarely saw his womankind except at meals, which periods of family life he enlivened by a good deal of strong language, grumbling at the cookery, and at the deterioration of landed property in general, and his own in particular. The rest of his home-life he spent in the billiard-room or the stables, since he found the society of the saddle-room more congenial than the dreariness of the drawing-room, where his mother and sisters were not always on speaking terms.

From such a house as the Mount—goodly and fair to look upon without as many other whited sepulchres—any escape would be welcome. Juliet felt that she was a great deal too good for a young man of uncertain prospects and humdrum surroundings; but he was very much in love, and he was good-looking, and in her own particular phraseology she was beginning to be rather weak about him. She was so weak that she let him hold her unresisting hand as they stood side by side in the garden, and devour it with kisses.

"You certainly ought to do well in the world," she said, sweetly; "for you are the most persistent person I ever knew."

He looked round, saw that they were alone in the garden, and clasped her in his arms, polar bear and all, and kissed the unresisting lips, as he had kissed the unresisting hand.

"My dearest," he exclaimed, "that means for life, does it not?"

"You are taking everything for granted," she said; "but I suppose it must be so. Only remember I don't want our engagement talked about till you are in a more assured position. My mother would make home a hell upon earth, if she knew."

"I will do nothing rash, nothing that you do not approve," replied Harrington, considerably relieved by this injunction; for although it was not Matthew Dalbrook's habit to make a pandemonium of the family circle, Harrington feared that he would strongly disapprove of such an alliance as that which his younger son had chosen for himself. He welcomed the idea of delay, hoping to be more firmly seated at the office desk before he must needs make the unpleasing avowal. "When my father finds I am valuable to him he will be more inclined to indulgence," he thought.

CHAPTER XV.

"For men have marble, women waxen minds,
And therefore are they formed as marble will;
The weak oppress'd, the impression of change kinds,
Is formed in them by force, by fraud, or skill;
Then call them not the authors of their ill."

INCLINATION would have taken Theodore Dalbrook to Dorsetshire before the Christmas holidays gave him an excuse for going home; but he wrestled with that haunting desire to revisit the Priory, and to be again *tête-à-tête* with his cousin in the dimly lighted room where she had talked to him of her own sorrows and of his ambitions. The memory of that last evening was the most vivid element in his life. It stood out like a spot of light against the dull grey of monotonous days, and the burden of dry-as-dust reading. But he had told her that he should not see her until Christmas time, and he was not weak enough to indulge that insane longing for the society of a woman whose heart was in the grave of her husband.

November and the greater part of December stretched before him like a long dark road which had to be trodden somehow before he came to the inn at which there would be light and comfort, cheerful voices, and friendly greetings. He set his face resolutely towards that dark prospect, and tramped along, doing the work he had to do, living the life of a hermit in those chambers in Ferret Court, which had already taken the stamp of his own character, and looked as if he had lived in them for years.

He had no need to sit alone at night with his books and his lamp, for there were plenty of houses in which he would have been welcome. His name was a passport in legal circles. Old friends of James Dalbrook's were ready to welcome his kinsman to their tables, eager to be of service to him. He had his college friends, too, in the great city, and need not have gone companionless. But he was not in the mood for society of any kind, old or young, except the society of Blackstone, Coke, and Justinian, and divers other sages who out of the dim past shed their light upon the legal wilderness of the present. He sat by his fire and read law, and laid down his book only to smoke his meditative pipe and indulge in foolish waking dreams about that grave old house in Dorsetshire and the young widow who lived there.

He had followed two of those three children of the old Squire, two out of the three faces in the picture in the hall at Cheriton, to the end of their story. No man could discover any postscript to that story, which in each case was closed by a grave.

There remained only one last unfinished record—the history of

the runaway wife, the end whereof was open to doubt. That unlucky lady's fate had been accepted upon hearsay. It had been said that she had died at Boulogne, within a year or so after the Vicar met her there.

Upon his return from Jersey, Theodore wrote to his father's oldest and most experienced clerk, begging him to hunt up the evidence of Mrs. Darcy's death, so far as it was obtainable at Cheriton or in the neighbourhood.

The clerk replied as follows, after an interval of ten days :—

"Dear Sir,

"I have been twice to Cheriton, and have made inquiries, cautiously as you wished, with respect to the report of Mrs. Darcy's death, some fifteen years ago, and saw Mr. Dolby, the doctor, and Gaster at the general shop, who, as you are no doubt aware, is a gentleman who busies himself a good deal about other people's affairs, and sets himself up for being an authority upon most things.

"Mr. Dolby I found very vague in his ideas. He remembered the late Vicar telling him about having met Mrs. Darcy in the market-place at Boulogne, and being shocked at the change in her. He told Mr. Dolby that he did not think she was long for this world; but it was some time after when Dolby heard some one—he could not remember who it was—assert that Mrs. Darcy was dead.

"Gaster had much more to say upon the subject. He pretends to be interested in all reminiscences of the Strangways, and boasts of having served Cheriton House for nearly forty years. He remembers Evelyn Strangway when she was a little girl, handsome and high-spirited. He remembered the report of her death at Boulogne getting about the village, and he remembered mentioning the fact to Lord Cheriton at the time. There was an election going on just then, and his lordship had looked in to consult him, Joseph Gaster, about certain business details: and his lordship seemed shocked to hear of the poor lady's death. 'I suppose that is the end of the family, my Lord?' Gaster said, and his lordship replied, 'Yes, that is the end of the Strangways.'

"Gaster believes that he must have read of the death in the newspapers; perhaps copied from the *Times* into a local paper; at any rate, the fact had implanted itself in his mind, and it had never occurred to him to doubt it.

"I asked him if he knew what had become of the lady's husband, but here his mind is a blank. He had heard that the man was a scamp, and that was all he knew about him.

"Since making these inquiries I have spent a long evening at the Literary Institute, where, as you know, there is a set of the *Times*, in volumes, extending over a period of forty years. I have looked through the deaths for three years, taking the year in which Gaster *thinks* he

heard of Mrs. Darcy's death, as the middle year out of three, but without result. It is, of course, unlikely that the death would be advertised if the poor lady died friendless and in poverty in a foreign town; but I thought it my duty to make this investigation.

"Awaiting your further commands, &c., &c."

There was nothing conclusive in this; and Theodore felt that the history of Mrs. Darcy's later years remained to be unravelled. It was not to be supposed that the runaway wife, who, if she were yet living must be an elderly woman, could have had act or part in the murder of Sir Godfrey Carmichael; but it was not the less a part of his task to trace her story to its final chapter. Then only could he convince Juanita of the wildness of that idea which connected the catastrophe of the 29th of July with the exiled Strangways. When he could say to her, "You see that long before that fatal night the Squire's three children had vanished from this earth," she would be constrained to confess that the solution of the mystery was not to be sought here.

He went over to Boulogne, saw the English chaplain, and several of the hotel-keepers. He explored the cemetery, and examined the record of the dead. He visited the police, and he made friends with the elderly editor of an old-established newspaper; but from all his questioning of various people the result was blank. Nobody remembered a Mrs. Darcy, an Englishwoman of distinguished appearance but fallen fortunes, a woman long past youth and yet not old. If she had lived for any time in Boulogne she had left no trace of her existence; if she had died and been buried there she had left no record among the graves.

Boulogne could tell him nothing. He came back to the great wilderness of London, the rallying point for all wanderers. It was there perhaps that the end of Evelyn Strangway was to be sought.

He had, as it seemed to him, only one clue, the name of her governess. The governess was only seven or eight years older than the pupil, and she might have survived her pupil, and might have been in communication with her till the end. Jasper Blake had told him that there was a strong attachment between Sarah Newton and the wayward girl she taught.

To hunt for a governess among the thousands of portionless gentlewomen who try to live by teaching might seem more hopeless than the proverbial search for the lost needle, but Theodore did not despair. If Miss Newton had remained a spinster and had continued to exercise her vocation as a teacher she might be traced through one of those agencies which transact business between governess and employer; but, on the other hand, if, as was more likely, she had long ago abandoned the profession of teacher, and had made some obscure marriage, she would have sunk into the vast ocean of middle-class life, in whose depths it would be almost

impossible to discover her. The first thing to be done was to make a visitation of the agencies, and this task Theodore began two days after his return from Boulogne.

He had methodized his life by this time, devoting a certain portion of his days to his cousin's interests, but in no wise neglecting the work he had to do for his own advancement. He had known too many instances of men who had made reading law an excuse for an idle and desultory life, and he was resolved that his own course should be steady and persistent even to doggedness. He had been told that success at the Bar was nowadays almost unattainable; that the men of the day who had conquered fame and were making great fortunes, were in a manner miraculous men, and that it was futile for any young man to hope to follow in their steps. The road *they* had trodden was barred against the new comer. Theodore listened to these pessimists, yet was not discouraged. He had told himself that he would emerge somehow from the obscurity of a country solicitor's practice—would bring himself in some wise nearer the social level of the woman he loved, so that if in the days to come one gleam of hope should ever shine upon that love he might be able to say to her, "My place in life is the place your father held when he offered himself to your mother; my determination to conquer fortune is not less than his."

He seldom passed the dingy door of the ground-floor chambers—on which the several names of three briefless ones were painted in dirty letters that had once been white—without thinking of his fortunate kinsman, without wondering what his life had been like in those darksome rooms, and in what shape fortune had first appeared to him. He had not married until he was forty. Long and lonely years had gone before that golden summertide of his life, when a young and lovely woman had given him happiness and fortune. How had he lived in those lonely years? Tradition accused him of miserly habits, of shabby raiment, of patient grinding and scraping to accumulate wealth. Theodore knew that if he had hoarded his earnings it had been for a worthy end. He had set himself to win a place among the lords of the soil. The land he loved had been to him as a mistress, and for that he had been content to live poorly and spend his nights in toil. For such miserliness Theodore had nothing but admiration; for he had seen how liberally the man who had scraped and hoarded was able to administer a large income—how generous as a master, friend, and patron the sometime miser had shown himself.

He spent more than a week in visiting the numerous agencies which are employed by the great governess-class, and the result of that painstaking exploration was not altogether barren. He succeeded in finding an elderly personage at the head of an old-established Agency, who kept her book with praiseworthy regularity, and who remembered Sarah Newton. She had had no less than

four Miss Newtons on her register at different times, but there was only one Sarah Newton among them, and for this lady she had obtained a situation in the Lake Country so lately as July 20, 1873—that is to say, about eleven years before the period of Theodore's investigation.

On that date Miss Newton had entered the family of a Mr. Craven—the vicar of a small parish between Ambleside and Bowness. She was living in that family four years afterwards, when Miss Palmer, the Principal in the Agency, last heard of her.

"And in all probability she is living there still," said Miss Palmer. "At her time of life people are not fond of change. I remember her when she was a young woman, full of energy, and very impatient of control. I used to see her much oftener then. She seldom kept a situation over a twelvemonth."

"Except at Cheriton Chase. She was more than a year in that situation, I think."

"Cheriton Chase! I don't remember the name. Some one else may have got her the situation. How long ago was she there, do you suppose?" asked Miss Palmer, turning over one of her neat basil-bound registers.

"It was in the year '47 she left Cheriton."

"Ah, then, it was not we who got her the situation. My first entry about her is on the 11th December, '48. She paid her entrance fee of one guinea on that date. It is higher than that of inferior agencies; but we take real trouble for our clients, and we make it our business to be safe upon the point of CHARACTER. We are as careful about the families into which we send governesses as about the governesses we introduce into families."

The next day was Sunday, and Theodore employed that day of rest in travelling by a very slow train to Bowness; where he arrived at five o'clock in the evening, to find mountain and lake hidden in densest grey, and an innkeeper who seemed neither to desire nor deserve visitors. Happily the traveller was of the age at which dinner is not a vital question, and he was hardly aware of the toughness of the steak, or the inferior quality of the codfish set before him in the desolate coffee-room. He had a diamond Virgil in his pocket, and he sat by the fire reading the sixth book by the paraffin lamp till ten o'clock, and then went contentedly to a bedroom which suggested ghosts, or at least nightmare.

No deadly visions troubled him, however, for the slow train had brought about a condition of abject weariness which resulted in dreamless slumber. The sun shone into his bleak bed-chamber when he awoke next morning, and the lake stretched beneath his windows, silver-shining, melting dimly into the grey of the opposite shore. The mountains were sulking still, and only showed their rugged crests above dark rolling clouds; but the scene was an

improvement upon the avenue of chimney-pots and distant glimpse of a murky Thames as seen from Ferret Court.

His landlord greeted him in a more cheerful spirit upon Monday morning than he had evinced on Sunday evening when his after-dinner lethargy was rudely disturbed by a guest whose business-like air and small Gladstone bag did not promise much profit; a visitor who would want a dinner off the joint, most likely, and a half-crown breakfast; a visitor whose libations would be limited to bitter beer and an occasional whisky and soda. Such a guest in a house that was beginning to hibernate was a burden rather than a boon.

This morning, however, the landlord was reconciled to his solitary customer, having told his wife that after all, "little fish are sweet," and he went blithely to order the dog-cart—his own cart and own man—ostler in the season, coachman or anything you please out of the season—to drive Mr. Dalbrook to Kettisford Vicarage, a nine-mile journey.

It was a pretty, out-of-the-way nook—half hidden in a cleft of the hills—at which Theodore arrived a few minutes after noon; a little, old-fashioned, world-forgotten village, and a sprawling old greystone house, covered with Virginia creeper, passion-flower, and the feathery leafage of the trumpet ash; a long, low house, with heavily thatched roof, projecting over its upper casements; a sleepy-looking old house in a still sleepier garden, so remote and so sheltered that winter had forgotten to come there; and the great yellow roses were still blooming on the wall, fattened by the misty atmosphere of the adjacent lake, glorified by the untainted air. November was half over, yet here the only signs of autumn were the grey sky, and the crimson of the Virginia creeper.

The Vicar of Kettisford was one of those privileged persons who can speak with their enemies at the gate, assured of being backed up in their speech by a family contingent. The Vicarage seemed overflowing with young life, from the very threshold of the hall, where cricket-bats, a tricycle, a row of well-used tennis rackets, a stupendous array of hats, overcoats, and comforters, testified to that quiverful so esteemed in the patriarchal age.

A conscientious performer was pounding at the "Harmonious Blacksmith" upon a wiry piano near at hand, having left the door wide open, with the indecent disregard of other people peculiar to juvenile performers upon all kinds of instruments. From the other side of the hall came the twanging of an equally wiry guitar, upon which girlish fingers began, and for ever recommenced a Spanish melody, which the performer was striving to attain by that agonizing process known among young ladies as "picking up" an air. Mark, gentle reader, what the learned and reverend Haweis has to say upon this art of playing by ear!

From a remoter room came young voices and young laughter;

and amidst all these sounds it was hardly surprising that Mr. Dalbrook had to ring three times, and to wait in front of the open hall door for at least ten minutes, before an elderly housemaid responded to his summons and ushered him into the Vicar's study, the one room in the Vicarage which was ever fit to receive a visitor.

The Vicar was reading a newspaper in front of a comfortable fire. He was an elderly man, of genial and even jovial aspect, and he received Mr. Dalbrook's apologetic account of himself and his business with perfect good humour.

"You want to see Miss Newton, my dear sir. I am sorry to tell you she left us nearly two years ago—heartily sorry, for Sarah Newton is a very worthy woman, and a jewel of price in a motherless family like mine," said the Vicar. "I regret that you should have come such a long way to find her when, had you written to me, I could have told you where to look for her in London."

"Yes, it was a mistake to come so far without making preliminary inquiries—only, as she had not applied to her usual agent for a new situation, I concluded that she was still under your roof."

"She has not gone into a new situation, Mr. Dalbrook. She was too much valued in this house to wish to change to another employment, although she might have lived more luxuriously and done less work elsewhere. She was a mother to my girls—ay, and to my boys as well—while she was with us; and she only left us when she made up her mind to live an independent life."

"She has left off teaching, then, I conclude?"

"Yes. She had a little bit of money left her by a bachelor uncle, safely invested in railway stock, and yielding about two hundred a year. This, with her own savings, made her an independent woman, and she made up her mind to realize her own ideal of a useful life—an ideal which had been developing in her mind for a good many years—a life which was to be serviceable to others, and yet pleasant to herself."

"Do you mean that she joined some sisterhood?"

"No, no, Mr. Dalbrook; Sarah Newton is much too fond of her own way, much too independent and fiery a spirit, to place herself in a position where other people would think for her, and where she would be obliged to obey. She told me her plan of life very frankly. 'I have about two hundred and sixty pounds a year,' she said; 'I can live comfortably upon half that money, if I live after a plan of my own; and I can do a great deal of good with the other half if I do it in my own way. I am elderly and plain. If I were to live amongst small gentilities I should be a nobody, and in all probability I should be considered a bore. I shall take a lodging in a poor neighbourhood, furnish my rooms with the utmost comfort, treat myself to a good piano, and collect my little library book by book from the second-hand booksellers. I shall spend half my days

in going quietly about among the poor young women of the district —I ought to know what girls are after nearly forty years' teaching and managing the species—and I shall spend half my income in doing as much good to them as I can, in my own unorthodox way.' I knew the good that brave little soul had done in this parish, in her quiet, unpretentious fashion, and I felt no doubt she would carry out her plan."

"Have you seen her since she left you?"

"Yes, I went to see her last June when I had a fortnight's holiday in London. I found her in a shabby old house in Lambeth, not very far from St. Thomas's Hospital; but dingy as the house looked outside, our good Sally's apartments were the picture of comfort. I found her as happy as a bird. Her plan of life had answered her highest expectations. 'My friends are legion,' she said, 'but I haven't a single gentility among them.' Sally is a desperate Radical, you must know."

"Will you give me her address, that I may write and ask her permission to call upon her?"

"You shall have the address, but I doubt if she will feel disposed to receive you. She will count you among the gentilities."

"I must try my chance at any rate. I want her to throw some light upon the history of one of her earliest pupils. Did you ever hear her talk of Cheriton Chase and the Strangway family?"

"My dear sir, I have heard her talk of any number of places, and any number of people. I used to tell her she must be a female Methuselah to have passed through so many experiences. She was very fond of telling stories of the families in which she had lived, but though I used to listen I remember very little about them. My girls would remember better, I have no doubt. They can give you chapter and verse, I dare say; so the best thing you can do is to eat your luncheon with us, and then you can ask them as many questions as you like."

Theodore accepted the offer with gratitude, and ten minutes afterwards followed the Vicar into the dining-room, where three tall, good-looking girls and two straggling youths were assembled, and where a fourth girl and another boy dropped in after the rest were seated. The board was spread with a plenteous but homely meal. A large dish of Irish stew smoked at one end of the table, and the remains of yesterday's roast ribs of beef appeared at the other.

The girls were evidently accustomed to droppers in, and received Theodore with perfect equanimity.

Alicia, the eldest, carved the beef with a commanding wrist, and the third daughter, Laura, administered to his appetite with pickled walnuts and mashed potatoes. The girls were all keenly interested directly he spoke of Miss Newton. They pronounced her a dear old thing, not a bit like a governess.

"We all loved her," said Alicia: "and we are not the easiest

girls to get on with, I can assure you. We have had two poor things since Sally deserted us, and we have driven them both away. And now we are enjoying an interregnum, and we hope the dear father will make it a long one."

"Did you ever hear your governess talk of the Strangways, Miss Craven?"

"What, Evelyn Strangway, of Cheriton Chase? I should think we did, indeed," cried Laura. "She had a good many prosy stories—chestnuts, we used to call them—but the Cheriton Chase stories were the most chestnutty. It was her first situation, and she was never tired of talking about it."

"Do you know if she kept up her acquaintance with Miss Strangway in after life?" asked Theodore.

"I think not; at any rate, she never talked about that. She knew something about the poor girl's later life—something very bad, I think—for she would never tell us. She used to sigh and look very unhappy if the subject was touched upon; and she used to warn us against runaway matches. As if any of us would be likely to run away from this dear old father?" protested Laura, leaning over the table to pat the Vicar's coat-sleeve. "Why, he would let us marry chimney-sweeps rather than see us unhappy."

There was a good deal more talk about Sarah Newton, her virtues and her little peculiarities, but nothing bearing upon Theodore's business, so he only stayed till luncheon was finished, and then wished the amiable Vicar and his family a friendly good-bye, offering to be of use to them in London at any time they might want some small business transacted there, and begging the Vicar to look him up at his chambers when he took his next holiday.

"You may rely upon it I shall take you at your word," said the parson cheerily. "You've no idea what a gay old dog I am when I am in town—the theatre every night, and a little bit of supper afterwards. I generally take one of my lads with me, though, to keep me out of mischief. Good-bye, and mind you don't fall in love with Sally Newton. She's old and ugly, but she's one of the most fascinating women I know."

Theodore drove off in the dog-cart with all the Vicarage family at the gate waving their hands to him, as if he had been an old friend, and with four Vicarage dogs barking at him.

He went back to London that night, and wrote to Miss Newton, asking leave to call upon her upon a matter relating to one of her old pupils on the following day. He should take silence to mean consent, and would be with her at four in the afternoon, if he did not receive a telegram to forbid him.

He worked in his chambers all the morning, and at a little after three set out to walk to Lambeth. The address was 51, Wedgewood Street, near the Lambeth Road. It was not a long walk, and it was not a pleasant one, for a seasonable fog was gathering when

Theodore left the Temple, and it thickened as he crossed Westminster Bridge, where the newly-lighted lamps made faint yellow patches in the dense brown atmosphere. Under these conditions it took him some time to find Wedgewood Street, and that particular house which had the honour of sheltering Sarah Newton.

It was a very shabby old street. The shops were of the meanest order, and the houses which were not shops looked as if they were mostly let off to the struggling class of lodgers; but it was a street that had evidently seen better days, for the houses were large and substantially built, and the doorways had once been handsome and architectural—houses which had been the homes of prosperous citizens when Lambeth was out of town, and when the perfume of bean blossom and new-mown hay found its way into Wedgewood Street.

The ground-floor of Number 51 was occupied by a shoemaker, a shoemaker who had turned his parlour into a shop, who made to measure, but was not above executing repairs neatly. The front door being open, Theodore walked straight upstairs to the first-floor landing, where there was a neat little Doulton ware oil-lamp burning on a carved oak bracket, and where he saw Miss Newton's name painted in bold black letters upon a terra-cotta coloured door. The stairs were cleaner than they generally are in such a house, and the landing was spotless.

He rang a bell, and the door was promptly opened by a lady, whom he took to be Miss Newton. She was rather below middle height, strongly built, but of a neat, compact figure. She was decidedly plain, and her iron grey hair was coarse and wiry; but she had large bright eyes which beamed with good nature and intelligence. Her black stuff gown and narrow linen collar, the knot of scarlet ribbon at her throat, and the linen cuffs turned back over perfectly-fitting sleeves, were all the pink of neatness, and suited her as no other kind of dress would have done. The trim figure, the bright eyes, and the small white hands made a favourable impression upon Theodore, in spite of the lady's homeliness of feature and complexion.

"Walk in, Mr. Dalbrook," she said cheerily. "Pray come and sit by the fire; you must be chilled to the bone after coming through that horrid fog. Ah, how I hate fog! It is the scourge of the London poor, and it sometimes kills even the rich. And now we are only at the beginning of the evil, and there is the long winter before us."

"Yes, it is very bad, no doubt; but you do not look as if the fog could do you much harm, Miss Newton."

"No, it won't hurt *me*. I'm a hardy old plant, and I contrive to make myself comfortable at all seasons."

"You do, indeed," he answered, glancing round the room. "I had no idea——"

"That anybody could be so comfortable in Lambeth," she said, interpreting his thoughts. "No, people think they must pay for what they call 'a good situation.' Poor pinched widows and shabby spinsters spend more than half their income on rent and taxes, and starve on the other half, in order to live in a genteel locality—some dingy little street in Pimlico perhaps, or a stucco terrace in Kensington. Here am I with two fine large rooms in a forgotten old street, which was built before the age of shoddy. I live among poor people, and am not obliged to sacrifice a sixpence for the sake of appearances. I buy everything in the cheapest market, and my neighbours look up to me, instead of looking down upon me, as they might if I lived among gentilities. You will say, perhaps, that I live in the midst of dirt and squalor. If I do I take care that none of it ever comes near me, and I do all that one woman's voice and one woman's pen can do to lessen the evils that I see about me."

"It would be a good thing for poor neighbourhoods if there were many ladies of your mind, Miss Newton," said Theodore, basking in the glow of the fire, and looking lazily round the room, with its two well-filled bookcases, occupying the recesses on each side of the fireplace, its brackets and shelves, and hanging pockets, its large old-fashioned sofa, and substantial claw-footed table, its wicker chairs, cushioned with bright colour—its lamps and candlesticks on shelf and bracket, ready to the hand when extra light should be wanted, its contrivances and handinesses of all kinds, which denoted the womanly inventiveness of the tenant.

"Well, I believe it would. If only a small percentage of the lonely spinsters of England would make their abode among the poor, things would have to be mended somehow. There could not be such crying evils as there are if there were more eyes to see them, and more voices to protest against them. You like this old room of mine, I see, Mr. Dalbrook," added Sarah Newton, following his eyes as they surveyed the dark red wall against which the brackets and shelves, and books and photographs, and bits of old china stood out in bright relief.

"I am full of admiration and surprise!"

"It is all my own work. I had lived in other people's houses so long that I was charmed to have a home of my own, even in Lambeth. I was determined to spend very little money, and yet to make myself comfortable; so I just squatted in the next room for the first three months, with only a bedstead, a table, and a chair or two, while I prowled all over London to find the exact furniture I wanted. There's not an article in the room that did not take me weeks to find and to buy, and there's not an article that wasn't a tremendous bargain. But what an egotistical old prattler I am! Women who live much alone get to be dreadful prosers. I won't say another word about myself—at any rate, not till after I've made you a cup of tea after your cold walk."

She had seen the mud upon his boots, and guessed that he had walked from the Temple.

"Pray do not take any trouble——"

"Nonsense; it is never trouble to a woman to make tea. I give a tea-party twice a week. I hope you like tea?"

"I adore it. But pray go on with your account of how you settled down here. I am warmly interested."

"That's very good of you—but there's not much to tell about myself," said Miss Newton, producing some pretty old china out of an antique cupboard with glass doors, and setting out a little brass tea-tray while she talked.

There was a small copper kettle singing on the old-fashioned hob, and there was a covered dish of toast in the capacious fender. Miss Newton's dinners were ever of the slightest, but she was a sybarite as to her tea and toast. No cheap and powdery mixture; no "inferior Dosset" for her. She made her brew with a dainty precision which Theodore admired, while she went on talking.

"Do you like the colour of the walls? Yes, I painted them. And you like that paper on the ceiling? I papered it. I am rather a dab at carpentering, too, and I put up all those shelves and brackets, and I covered the chairs, and stained the boards round that old Turkey carpet; and then, after a day's hard work, it was very pleasant to go and stroll about among the bookshops of an evening and pick up a volume here and there till I got all my old friends about me. I felt like Elia; only I had no Bridget to share my pleasure."

She seated herself opposite to him with a wicker table in front of her, and began to pour out the tea. He wondered to find himself as much at home with her as if he had known her all his life.

"It is very good of you to receive me so cordially," he said, presently. "I feel that I come to you as an unauthorized intruder."

"Can you guess why I was willing to receive you?" she asked, looking at him intently and with a sudden gravity. "Can you guess why I didn't telegraph to forbid your coming?"

"Indeed, no, except because you are naturally kind."

"My kindness had nothing to do with it. I was willing to see you because of your name. It is a very familiar name to me—Dalbrook, the name of the man who bought the house in which she was born. Poor soul, how she must have hated him, in her desolate after years. How she must have hated the race that ousted her from the home she loved."

"You are talking of Evelyn Strangway?"

"Yes, she was my first pupil, and I was very fond of her—all the fonder of her, perhaps, because she was wayward and difficult to manage: and because I was much too young and inexperienced to exercise any authority over her."

"It is of her I want to talk to you, if you will allow me."

"Certainly. I like talking of those old days when I was a girl. I don't suppose I was particularly happy at Cheriton Chase; but I was young, and we most of us hug the delusion that we were happy in our youth. Poor Evelyn—so often in disgrace—so often unhappy, from the very dawn of girlhood! What reason can *you* have for being curious about her?"

"I have a very strong reason, though I cannot explain it yet awhile. I have set myself to discover the history of that banished race."

"After the angel with the flaming sword stood at the gate—that is to say, after Mr. Dalbrook bought the property. By-the-by, what are you to Lord Cheriton? His son perhaps?"

"No, I am only a distant cousin."

"Is it on his account you are making these inquiries?"

"He is not even aware that I am making them."

"Indeed; and pray how did you find me out? My tea-parties are not recorded in the Society papers; I have never figured among 'Celebrities at Home.'"

"I took some pains to find you," said Theodore, and then he told her of his visits to the agencies, and his journey to the Vicarage in Lakeland.

"You have taken infinite trouble, and for a small result. I can give you very little information about Evelyn Strangway—afterwards Mrs. Darcy."

"Did you lose sight of her after you left Cheriton?"

"Yes, for a long time. It was years before we met again; but she wrote to me several times from Lausanne, during the first year of her banishment; doleful letters, complaining bitterly of her father's cruelty in keeping her away from her beloved Cheriton, the horses and dogs, the life she loved. School she detested. She was clever, but she had no taste for intellectual pursuits. She soon wearied of the lake and the mountains, and the humdrum society of a small town. She wrote of herself as a galley-slave. Then came a sudden change, and she began to write about *him*. You don't know the way a girl writes about *him*; the first him she has ever thought worthy to be written about. Her tone was light enough at the beginning. She had met a young Irishman at a little evening party, and they had laughed together at Lausanne society. He was an officer, on furlough, full of wit and fun. I need not go into details. I saw her danger, and warned her; I reminded her that her father would never allow her to marry a subaltern in a marching regiment, and that such a marriage would mean starvation. Her father could give her nothing; it was incumbent on her to marry well, and with her attractions she had only to wait for a good offer. It would inevitably come in due time."

"She was handsome, I suppose? I know her face in the picture at Cheriton. My cousin bought all the old portraits."

"She was much handsomer than the picture. That was painted

when she was only fifteen, but at seventeen her beauty had developed, and she was one of the most brilliant blondes I ever saw. Well, I suppose you know how useless my advice was. She ran away with her Irish admirer, and I heard no more of her for nearly four years, when I met her one afternoon in the Strand, and she took me home to her lodging in Cecil Street, and gave me some tea. It was in October, and I stayed with her till dark, and then she insisted on seeing me off in the omnibus to Haverstock Hill, where I was then living in an artist's family. The lodgings were shabby, and she was shabbily dressed. She was as handsome as ever, but she looked worried and unhappy. Her husband had sold out of the army, and had a position as secretary to a West End club.

"She told me that they would have been pretty well off but for his extravagance. He was getting four hundred a year, and they had no children. She complained that it was her fate to be allied with spendthrifts. Her father had squandered his fortune; and her husband's improvident habits kept her in continual debt and difficulty. It grieved me to see the shabbiness of her surroundings—the squalid lodging-house parlour, without so much as a bunch of flowers or a stand of books to show that it was in the occupation of a lady. There was a cigarbox on the mantelpiece, and there was a heap of newspapers on the sofa, and a pair of shabby slippers inside the fender. It was a room to make one shudder. I asked her if she was reconciled to her father, and she said no; she had heard nothing of him since her marriage. I felt very unhappy about her after we parted at Hungerford Market. I saw her standing on the pavement as the omnibus drove away, a tall, slim figure, distinguished-looking in spite of her shabby mantle and rusty black silk gown. I had promised to go and see her again, though I was very seldom at liberty at that time, and I went to Cecil Street two or three times in the course of the winter, but she was always out, and there was something in the tone of her letters that made me think she did not wish to see me again, though I believe she was fond of me always, poor soul. I saw nothing more of her, and heard nothing until nearly four years afterwards, when I was spending an afternoon at Richmond with my pupils—two girls of fourteen and sixteen—and I came face to face with her in front of Thomson's Seat. She was with a tall, handsome man, whom at first I took to be her husband: but there was something in the manner of both of them that impressed me uncomfortably, and I began to fear that this was not her husband. She looked much brighter than when I saw her in Cecil Street, and she was better dressed—very plainly, but in excellent taste. She took me aside a little way while her companion stood and talked to the two girls. She put her arm through mine in her old caressing way, and then she said, abruptly, 'I almost wonder that you will speak to me. I thought you would cut me dead.' I looked puzzled, no doubt; so she said, 'Perhaps

you don't know what a lost creature I am. Perhaps you have not heard.' I told her I had heard nothing about her since we parted at Hungerford Market, and then she gave a deep sigh, and said, 'Well, I am not going to deceive you. That,' with a jerk of her head towards the man who was standing with his back to us, 'is not my husband, but he and I are bound together for the rest of our lives, and we are perfectly happy together. Society would scorn us and trample upon us no doubt if we gave it a chance; but we don't. We live out of the world, and we live for one another. Now, aren't you shocked with me? Don't you want to run away?' she asked, with a little laugh, which sounded as if she was very nearly crying. I told her that I was very sorry for her. I could say no more than that. 'You would be sorrier still if you could picture to yourself the miserable life I led before I left my husband,' she said. 'I bore it for five years, years that seemed an eternity. He cared for me no more than for the flower-girls in the street. He left me to pine in my dingy lodging, left me to be dunned and worried all day long, left me out-at-elbows, ashamed of my own shabbiness, while he amused himself at his club; and then he considered himself cruelly used when he found out there was another man in the world who thought me worth caring for, and when I told him I loved that man with all my heart. My leaving him was the impulse of a moment. The moment came when his brutality turned the scale, and I ran out of the house in my despair, and jumped into the first cab I could hail, and drove away to *him*,' pointing to the man in the distance, strolling beside my two gawky girls, 'and to happiness. I am a wicked wretch, no doubt, to be happy under such circumstances, but I am, or, at any rate, as happy as anybody can hope to be in this world. There is always a thorn among the flowers,' she sighed, as if the thorn was a big one, I thought. 'I suppose I shall never see you again,' she said. 'When we say good-bye presently, it will be farewell for ever.' I told her that was not inevitable. I was my own mistress, free to choose my friends. I told her that if ever she had need of a friend I would go to her. I felt that I was in some wise answerable for the bad turn her life had taken, for had I been a more judicious counsellor, I might have guided her better, might have prevented her coming into collision with her father. I asked her for her address, but she told me she had promised to tell nobody where she lived. 'We are living out of the world,' she said, 'we have no visitors, no friends or acquaintance.' She clasped my hands, kissed me, and hurried away to rejoin the man whose name I never learned. He lifted his hat to me and the girls, and they walked away together towards the Star and Garter, leaving us standing by Thomson's Seat, staring idly at the landscape in the summer sunlight. I felt dazed as I stood there, looking down into that lovely valley. It had been a terrible shock to me to meet her again under such circumstances."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Be useful where thou livest, that they may
Both want and wish thy pleasing presence still.
. . . . . All worldly joys go less
To the one joy of doing kindnesses."

"WHAT impression did the man make upon you in that brief meeting?" asked Theodore. "Did he strike you as a *roué?*"

"No, that was the odd part of the business. He had the steady, respectable air of a bread-winner, a professional, or perhaps a commercial man. I could not tell which. There was nothing flashy or dissipated in his appearance. He looked me steadily in the face when he bowed to me at parting, and he had a frank, straightforward expression, and a grave decision of manner that was not without dignity. He was soberly dressed in a style that attracted no attention. I had no doubt that he was a gentleman."

"He was handsome, you say?"

"Yes, he was decidedly handsome—but I can remember only the general character of his face, not features or details, for I saw him only twice in my life."

"Ah, you saw him again?"

"Once again—some years later, after her death."

"She is dead, then?" cried Theodore; "that is the fact I am most anxious to learn from a reliable source of information. There was a rumour of her death years ago, but no one could give me any evidence of the fact. I went to Boulogne last week to try and trace her to her last resting-place; but I could discover neither tombstone nor record of any kind."

"And yet it was at Boulogne she died. I will tell you all I know about her, if you like. It doesn't amount to much."

"Pray, tell me everything you can. I am deeply grateful to you for having treated me with so much frankness."

"It was on her account I received you. I am glad to talk to any one who is interested in her pitiful fate. There were so few to care for her. I think there is no lot more sad than that of a broken-down gentleman's daughter, born to an inheritance she is never to enjoy, brought up to think of herself as a personage, with a right to the world's respect, and finding herself friendless and penniless in the bloom of her womanhood, exposed to the world's contumely."

Theodore's face flushed a little at this mention of his interest in the unhappy lady, for he could but feel that the interest was of a sinister kind; but he held his peace, and Miss Newton went on with her story.

"It was ever so many years after that meeting in Richmond Park

—I think it must have been nearly ten years—when I ran against that very man upon a windy March day in Folkestone. I had thought much and often of my poor girl in all those years, wondering how the world had used her, and whether the lover whom she trusted so implicitly had been true to her. I shuddered at the thought of what her fate might have been if he were false. I had never heard a word about her in all that time. I had seen no report of a Divorce suit in the papers. I knew absolutely nothing of her history from the hour I parted with her by Thomson's Seat till I ran against that man in Folkestone. I am rather shy about speaking to strangers in a general way; but I was so anxious to know her fate that I stopped this man, whose very name was unknown to me, and asked him to tell me about my poor friend. He looked bewildered, as well he might, at being pounced upon in that manner. I explained that I was Evelyn Strangway's old governess, and that I was uneasy at having lost sight of her for so many years, and was very anxious to see her again. He looked troubled at my question, and he answered me gravely—'I am sorry to say you will never do that. Your friend is dead.' I asked when she died, and where? He told me within the last month, and at Boulogne. I asked if he was with her at the last, and he said no; and then he lifted his hat and muttered something about having very little time to get to the station. He was going to London by the next train, it seemed, and he was evidently anxious to shake me off; but I was determined he should answer at least one more question. 'Was her husband with her when she died?' I asked. His face darkened at the question, which I suppose was a foolish one. 'Do you think it likely?' he said, trying to move past me; but I had laid my hand upon his sleeve in my eagerness. 'Pray tell me that her end was not unhappy—and that she was penitent for her sins.' He looked very angry at this. 'If I stand here talking to you another minute I shall lose my train, madam,' he said, 'and I have important business in London this afternoon.' A fly came strolling by at this moment. He hailed it and jumped in, and he drove off into what Thomas Carlyle would call the Immensities. I never saw him again; I never knew his name, or calling, or place of abode, or anything about him. I can no more localize him than I can Goethe's Mephistopheles. God knows how he treated my poor girl—whether he was kind or cruel; whether he was faithful to a dishonourable tie, or whether he held it as lightly as such ties have been held by the majority of men from Abraham downwards."

The little woman's face flushed and her eyes filled as she gave vent to her feelings.

"And this is all you know of Evelyn Strangway?" said Theodore, when she had finished.

"This is all I know of her. And now tell me why you are so anxious to learn her history—you who can never have seen her face,

except in the picture at Cheriton. I dressed her for that picture and sat by while it was painted."

"I will tell you the motive of my curiosity," answered Theodore. "You have treated me so frankly that I feel I must not withhold my confidence from you. I know that I can rely upon your discretion."

"I can talk, as you have just heard," said Miss Newton; "but I can be silent as the grave, when I like."

"You must have read something about the murder at Cheriton last July."

"I read a great deal about it. I took a morbid interest in the case, knowing the house so well in every cranny and corner. I could picture the scene as vividly as if I had seen the murdered man lying there. A most inexplicable murder, apparently motiveless."

"Apparently motiveless. That fact has so preyed upon the widow's mind that she has imagined a motive. She has a strange fancy that one of the Strangways must have been the author of the crime. She has brooded over their images till her whole mind has become possessed with the idea of one of that banished race, garnering his wrath for long years, until at last the hour came for a bloody revenge, and then striking a death-blow out of the dark—striking his fatal blow and vanishing from the sight of men, as if a phantom arm had been stretched out of the night to deal that blow. She has asked me to help her in discovering the murderer, and I am pledged to do my utmost towards that end. I am the more anxious to do so as I tremble for the consequences if she should be allowed to brood long upon this morbid fancy about the Strangways. I think, however, that with your help I have now laid that ghost. I have traced the two brothers to their graves; and I suppose we may accept the statement of the man you met at Folkestone as sufficient evidence of Mrs. Darcy's death; especially as it seems to fit in with the account of the then Vicar of Cheriton, who met her in Boulogne in the summer of '64 looking very ill and much aged."

"It was in the spring of '65 I met that man at Folkestone. I could find the exact date in my diary if you wished to be very precise about it, for it is one of my old-maidish ways to be very regular in keeping my diary. Poor Evelyn! To think that any one should be mad enough to suspect her of being capable of murder—or Fred or Reginald. They had the Strangway temper, all three of them; and a fiery temper it was when it was roused, a temper that led to family quarrels and all sorts of unhappiness; but murder is a different kind of thing."

"That is the question," said Theodore, gravely. "Is there such a wide gulf between the temper that makes family quarrels, sets father against son, and brother against brother, and the temper that

pulls a trigger or uses a bowie-knife? I thought they were one and the same thing in actual quality, and that the result was dependent upon circumstances."

"Oh, don't talk like that, please. Murder is something exceptional—a hideous solecism in nature—and in this case why murder? What had Sir Godfrey Carmichael done that any member of the Strangway family should want to kill him?"

"I tell you that the idea is a wild one, the morbid growth of my cousin's sorrow."

"Of course it is. I am very sorry for her, poor soul. I don't suppose any woman could suffer more than she must have suffered. It is a dreadful story. And she was very fond of her husband, I dare say."

"She adored him. They had been lovers almost from her childhood. There never were a more devoted bride and bridegroom. Their honeymoon was not even beginning to wane. They were still lovers, still in a state of sweet surprise at finding themselves husband and wife. Poor girl, I saw her the day before the murder, a brilliant creature, the very spirit of joy. I saw her the morning after, a spectre, with awful eyes and marble face—more dreadful to look upon than her murdered husband."

"It is all too sad," sighed Miss Newton. "I begin to think that Cheriton is a fatal house, and that no one can be happy there. However, you can tell this poor lady that the Strangways are exonerated from any part in her misery."

"I shall write to her to-night to that effect. And now, Miss Newton, let me thank you once more for your friendly frankness, and wish you good night."

"Don't be in such a hurry, Mr. Dalbrook. I like your face, and I should like to see you again some day, if you can find time to waste an hour upon an old maid in such a God-forsaken place as Wedgewood Street."

"I shall think an hour so spent most delightfully employed," answered Theodore, who was quite subjugated by the charm of this little person and her surroundings.

He did not remember having ever sat in a room he liked better than this first-floor front in Wedgewood Street, with its terra-cotta walls, prettily-bound books, curious oddments of old china, and comfortable curtains of creamy workhouse-sheeting, with a bold vermilion border worked by Sarah Newton's indefatigable fingers.

"I should very much like to hear all about your life in this—strange neighbourhood," he said.

"There is not much to tell. When my little fortune—left by my uncle, the drysalter—fell in to me I was a lonely old woman, without one surviving relative for whom I cared twopence. I was pretty tired of teaching French and German—God knows how many hundred times I must have gone through Ollendorff in both languages—

and I've done him a good many times in Italian, *par dessus le marché*. Perhaps I might have held on for a year or two longer, as I was very fond of those nice girls and boys at Kettisford Vicarage, if it hadn't been for Ollendorff. *He* decided me. Leila, the youngest girl, had only just begun that accursed book. She was blundering over 'the baker's golden candlestick' the very morning I got the lawyer's letter to tell me of my uncle's death, and the will, and the legacy. I snatched the book out of her hand, and shut it with a bang. 'Ain't I to do any more Ollendorff, Sally?' she asked. 'You may do as much as you like, my love,' I said, 'but you'll do no more with me. I'm a millionaire, or at least I feel as rich and independent as if I were a Rothschild.' Well, I lay awake all that night making plans for my life, and trying to think out how I could get the most comfort out of my little fortune, enjoy my declining years, have everything I wanted, and yet be of some use to my fellow-creatures; and the end of it was that I made up my mind to take a roomy lodging in a poor neighbourhood, where I should not be tempted to spend a penny upon appearances, furnish it after my own heart, and make myself happy in just my own way, without caring a straw what anybody thought about me. I knew that I was plain as well as elderly, that I could never be admired, or cut a figure in the genteel world, so I determined to renounce the gentilities altogether and to be looked up to in a little world of my own."

"And you have found your plan answer—— "

"It has answered beyond my hopes. Ever since I was thirty years of age and had finished with all young ideas and day-dreams, I had one particular ideal of earthly bliss, and that was the position of a country squire's wife—an energetic, active, well-meaning woman, the central figure in a rural village, having her model cottages and her allotment gardens, her infirmary, her mission-house—the good genius of her little community, a queen in miniature, and without political entanglements, or menace of foreign war. Now it could never be my lot to reign on a landed estate, to build cottages, or cut up fertile meadows for cottagers' gardens; but I thought by taking up my abode in a poor neighbourhood, and visiting in a friendly, familiar way—no tracts or preachings—among the most respectable of the inhabitants, and slowly feeling my way among the difficult subjects, I might gradually acquire an influence just as strong as that of the Lady Bountiful in a country parish, and might come to be as useful in my small way as the squire's wife with her larger means. And I have done it," added Miss Newton, triumphantly. "There are rooms in this street and in other streets that are to me my model cottages. There are overworked, underfed women who look up to me as their Providence. There are children who come and hang to my skirts as I pass along the streets. There are great hulking men who ask my advice and get me to write their letters for them.

What could a squire's wife have more than that? And yet I have only a hundred and fifty pounds a year to spend upon my people."

"You give them something more than money. You give them sympathy—the magnetism of your strong and generous nature."

"Ah, there is something in that. Magnetism is a good word. There must be some reason why people attach themselves so ardently to Mr. Gladstone, don't you know,—some charm in him that holds them almost in spite of themselves, and makes them think as he thinks, and veer as he veers. Yes, they swing round with him like the boats going round with the tide, and they can't help it any more than the boats can. And I think, to compare small things with great, there must be some touch of that magnetic power in *me*," concluded Miss Newton.

"I am sure of it," said Theodore, "and I am sure, too, that you must be like a spot of light in this dark little world of yours."

"I live among my friends. That is the point," explained Miss Newton. "I don't come from Belgravia, or from a fashionable terrace in Kensington, and tell them they ought to keep their wretched rooms cleaner, and open their windows and put flower-pots on their window-sills. I live here, and they can come and see how I keep *my* rooms, and judge for themselves. Their landlord is my landlord; and a nice life I lead him about water, and whitewash, and drains. He is thoroughly afraid of me, I am happy to say, and generally bolts round a corner when he sees me in the street; but I am too quick for his over-fed legs. I tackle him about all his shortcomings, and he finds it easier to spend a few pounds upon his property now and then than to have *me* upon his heels at every turn; so now Crook's tenements have quite a reputation in Lambeth. If you were to see the old dragon you would wonder at my pluck in attacking him, I can assure you."

"Your whole life is wonderful to me, Miss Newton; and I only wish there were hundreds of women in this big city living just as you live. Tell me, please, what kind of people your neighbours are."

"Oh, there are people of all kinds, some of course who are quite impracticable, for whom I can do nothing; but there are many more who are glad of my friendship, and who receive me with open arms. The single women and widows are my chief friends, and some of those I know as well as if we had been brought up and educated upon the same social level. They are workwomen of all kinds, tailoresses, shirt-makers, girls who work for military outfitters, extra hands for Court dressmakers, shop-girls at the humbler class of shops, shoe-binders, artificial-flower-makers. I wonder whether you would like to see some of them."

"I should like it very much indeed."

"Then perhaps you will come to one of my tea-parties. I give two tea-parties a week all through the winter, to just as many of my women friends as this room will hold. It holds about twenty very comfortably, so I make twenty-five the outside limit. We rather enjoy a little bit of a crush—and I give my invitations so that they all have such pleasure as I can give them, fairly, turn and turn about. We do not begin our evening too early, for the working hours are precious to my poor things. We take tea at eight o'clock, and we seldom separate before half-past eleven—just as if we were at a theatre. We have a little music, a little reading and recitation, and sometimes a round game at cards. When we are in a wild humour we play dumb-crambo, or even puss-in-the-corner; and we have always a great deal of talk. We sit round this fireplace in a double semi-circle, the younger ones sitting on the rug in front of us elders, and we talk, and talk, and talk—about ourselves mostly, and you can't think what good it does us. Surely God gave man speech as the universal safety-valve. It lets off half our troubles, and half our sense of the world's injustice."

"Please let me come to your very next party," said Theodore, smiling at the little woman's ardour.

"That will be to-morrow evening," replied Miss Newton. "I shall have to make an excuse for your appearance, as we very seldom invite a man. You will have to read or recite something, as a reason for your being asked, don't you know."

"I will not recoil even from that test. I have distinguished myself occasionally at a Penny Reading. Am I to be tragic—or comic?"

"Be both if you can. We like to laugh; but we revel in something that makes us cry desperately. If you could give us something creepy into the bargain, freeze our blood with a ghost or two, it would be all the more enjoyable."

"I will satiate you with my talents; I shall feel like Pentheus when he intruded upon his mother and her crew, and shall be humbly grateful for not being torn to pieces. I dare say I shall be torn to pieces morally, in the way of criticism. Good night, and a thousand thanks."

"Wait," said Miss Newton. "I'm afraid it is much foggier than when you came. I have smelt the fog coming on while we have been talking. Wouldn't you like a cab?"

"I should very much, but I doubt if I shall succeed in finding one."

"*You* wouldn't, but I dare say I can get you one," replied Miss Newton, decisively.

She had an unobtrusive little chatelaine at her side, and from the bunch of implements, scissors, penknife, thimble, she selected a

small whistle. Then she pulled back one of the cream-white curtains, opened the window, and whistled loud and shrill into the fog. Two minutes afterwards there came a small treble voice out of the darkness.

"What is it, Miss Newton?"

"Who's that?"

"Tommy Meadows."

"All right, Tommy. Do you think you could find a hansom without getting yourself run over?"

"Rather! Do you want it bringed to your door, miss?"

"If you please, Tommy."

"I'm off," cried the shrill voice, and in less than ten minutes a two-wheeler rattled along the street, and drew up sharply at Tommy's treble command, with Tommy himself seated inside, enjoying the drive and the uncertainty of the driver.

His spirits were still further exalted by the gift of sixpence from Theodore as he stepped into the cab, to be taken back to the Temple at a foot pace.

Even that sitting-room of his, which he had taken pains to make comfortable and home-like, had a gloomy look after that bright room in Lambeth, with its terra-cotta walls and cream-coloured curtains, its gaily-bound books and vivid Vallauris vases perched in every available corner. He was more interested in that quaint interior, and in the woman who had created it, than he had been in any one except that one woman who filled the chief place in all his thoughts. The Vicar of Kettisford had not over-estimated Sarah Newton's power of fascination.

He was in Wedgewood Street at a few minutes before eight on the following evening. The sky above Lambeth was no longer obscured; there were wintry stars shining over that forest of chimney pots and everlasting monotony of slated roofs; and even Lambeth looked lively with its costers' barrows and bustle of even-tide marketing. Theodore found the door open, as it had been yesterday, and he found an extra lamp upon the first floor landing, and the door of Miss Newton's room ajar, while from within came the sound of many voices, moderated to a subdued tone, but still lively.

His modest knock was answered by Miss Newton herself, who was standing close to the door, ready to greet every fresh arrival.

"How do you do? We are nearly all here," she said, cheerily. "I hope you have not just been dining, for with us tea means a hearty meal, and if you can't eat anything we shall feel as if you were Banquo's ghost. How do you do, Mrs. Kirby?" to another arrival. "Baby better, I hope? Yes, that's right. How are you, Clara? and you, Rose? You've had that wretched tooth out—I can see it in your face. Such a relief, isn't it? So glad to see you,

Susan Dale, and you, Maria, and you, Jenny. Why, we are all here, I do believe."

"Yes, Miss Newton," said a bright-looking girl by the fireplace, who had been making toast indefatigably for twenty minutes, and whose complexion had suffered accordingly. "There are two and twenty of us, four and twenty, counting the gentleman and you. I think that's as many as you expected."

"Yes, everybody's here. So we may as well begin tea."

In most such assemblies, where the intention was to benefit a humble class of guests, the proceedings would have begun with a hymn; but at Miss Newton's parties there were neither hymns nor prayers—and yet Miss Newton loved her hymn-book, and delighted in the pathos and the sweetness of the music with which those familiar words are interwoven; nor would she yield to anybody in her belief in the efficacy of prayer; but she had made up her mind from the beginning that her tea-parties were to be pure and simple recreation, and that any good which should come out of them was to come incidentally. The women and girls who came at her bidding were to feel they came to be entertained, came as her guests, just as, had they been duchesses, they might have gone to visit other duchesses in Park Lane or Carlton Gardens. They were not asked in order that they should be taught, or preached to, or wheedled into the praying of prayers or the singing of hymns. They went as equals to visit a friend who relished their society.

And did not everybody relish the tea! which might be described as a Yorkshire tea of a humble order; not the Yorkshire tea which may mean mayonnaise and perigord pie, chicken and champagne—but tea as understood in the Potteries of Hull, or the humbler alleys and streets of Leeds or Bradford. Three moderate-sized tables had been put together to make one capacious board, spread with snowy damask, upon which appeared two large plum loaves, two tall towers of bread and butter, a glass bowl of marmalade, a bowl of jam, two dishes of thinly-sliced German sausage set off with sprigs of parsley —German sausage bought at the most respectable ham and beef shop in the Borough, and as trustworthy as German sausage can be; and for crowning glory of the feast a plentiful supply of shrimps, freshly boiled, savouring of the unseen sea. The hot buttered toast was frizzling on a brass footman in front of the fire, ready to be handed round piping hot, as required. There were two tea-trays, one at each end of the table, and there were two bright copper kettles, which had never been defiled by the smoke of the fire, filled with admirable tea.

Miss Newton took her place at the head of the table, with Theodore on her right hand, and a pale and fragile looking young woman on her left. These two assisted the hostess in the administration

of the tea-tray, handing cups and saucers, sugar-basin and cream-jug; and in so doing they had frequent occasion to look at each other.

Having gone there prepared to be interested, Theodore soon began to interest himself in this young woman, whom Miss Newton addressed as Marian. She was by no means beautiful now, but Theodore fancied that she had once been very handsome, and he occupied himself in reconstructing the beauty of the past from the wreck of the present.

The lines of the face were classic in their regularity, but the hollow cheeks and pallid complexion told of care and toil, and the face was aged untimely by a hard and joyless life. The eyes were darkest grey, large and pathetic-looking, the eyes of a woman who had suffered much and thought much. The beauty of those eyes gave a mournful charm to the pale pinched face, and the light auburn hair was still luxuriant. Theodore noted the delicate hands and taper fingers, which differed curiously from the other hands which were busy around the hospitable board.

He could see that this young woman was a favourite with Sarah Newton, and he told himself that she was of a race apart from the rest; but he was agreeably surprised in finding that, except for the prevailing Cockney accent, and a few slight lapses in grammar and pronunciation, Miss Newton's guests were quite as refined as those ladies of Dorchester with whom it had been his privilege to associate; indeed, he was not sure that he did not prefer the Cockney twang and the faulty grammar to the second-hand smartness and slang of the young ladies whose "Awfully jolly," "Ain't it," and "Don't you know," had so often irritated his ear on tennis lawn or at afternoon tea. Here at least there was the unstudied speech of people who knew not the caprices of fashion or the latest catch word that had descended from Belgravia to Brompton, and from Brompton to the provinces.

There was a great deal of talk, as Miss Newton had told him there would be; and as she encouraged all her guests to talk about themselves, he gathered a good deal of interesting information about the state of the different trades and the ways and manners of various employers, most of whom seemed to be of a despotic and grasping temper. The widows talked of their children's ailments or their progress at the Board School; the girls talked a little, and with all modesty, of their sweethearts. Sarah Newton was interested in every detail of those humble lives, and seemed to remember every fact bearing upon the joys or the sorrows of her guests. It was a wonder to Theodore, to see how the care-worn faces lighted up round the cheerful table in the lamp-light. Yes, it was surely a good thing to live among these daughters of toil, and to lighten their burdens by this quick sympathy, this cheerful hospitality. Vast

Pleasure Halls and People's Palaces may do much for the million; but here was one little spinster with her small income making an atmosphere of friendliness and comfort for the few, and able to get a great deal nearer to them than Philanthropy on a gigantic scale can ever get to the many.

Theodore noticed that while most other tongues babbled freely, the girl called Marian sat silent, after her task of distributing the tea was over, with hands folded in her lap, listening to the voices round her, and with a soft slow smile lighting her face now and then. In repose her countenance was deeply sad, and he found himself speculating upon the history that had left those melancholy lines upon a face that was still young.

"I am much interested in your next neighbour," he said to Miss Newton, presently, while Marian was helping another girl to clear the table. "I feel sure there must be something very sad in her experience of life, and that she has sunk from a higher level."

"So do I," answered Miss Newton, "but I know very little more about her than you do, except that she is a most exquisite worker with those taper fingers of hers, and that she has worked for the same baby-linen house for the last three years, and has lived in the same second-floor back in Hercules' Buildings. I think she is as fond of me as she can be, yet she has never told me where she was born, or who her people were, or what her life has been like. Once she went so far as to tell me that it had been a very commonplace life, and that her troubles had been in nowise extraordinary—except the fact of her having had a very severe attack of typhus fever, which left her a wreck. Once, from some chance allusion, I learnt that it was in Italy she caught the fever, and that it was badly treated by a foreign doctor; but that one fact is all she ever let slip in her talk, so carefully does she avoid every mention of the past. I need hardly tell you that I have never questioned her. I have reason to know that her life for the last three years has been spotless—an industrious, temperate, Christian life—and that she is charitable and kind to those who are poorer than herself. That is quite enough for me, and I have encouraged her to make a friend of me in every way in my power."

"She is happy in having found such a friend, an invaluable friend to a woman who has sunk from happier surroundings."

"Yes, I think I have been a comfort to her. She comes to me for books, and we meet nearly every day at the Free Library, and compare notes about our reading. My only regret is that I cannot induce her to take enough air and exercise. She spends all the time that she can spare from her needlework in reading. But I take her for a walk now and then, and I think she enjoys that. A penn'orth of the tramcar carries us to Battersea Park, and we can stroll about amongst grass and trees, and in sight of the river. She

is better off than most of the girls in the way of getting a little rest after toil, for that fine, delicate needlework of hers pays better than the common run of work, and she is the quickest worker I know."

The tables were cleared by this time, and space had been made for that half-circle round the fire of which Miss Newton had spoken on the previous night. The younger girls brought hassocks and cushions, and seated themselves in the front rank, while their elders sat in the outer row of chairs.

Theodore was now called upon to contribute his share to the entertainment, and thereupon took a book from his pocket.

"You told me you and your friends were fond of creepy stories, Miss Newton," he said. "Is that really so?"

"Really and truly."

"And you are none of you afflicted with weak nerves—you are not afraid of being made uncomfortable by the memory of a ghastly story?"

"No. I think that with most of us the cares of life are too real and too absorbing to leave any room in our minds for imaginary horrors. Isn't it so, now, friends?"

"Lor, yes, Miss Newton," answered one of the girls briskly: "we're all of us too busy to worry about ghosts; but I love a ghost tale for all that."

A chorus of voices echoed this assertion.

"Then, ladies, I shall have the honour of reading the 'Haunters and the Haunted,' by Bulwer Lytton."

The very title of the story thrilled them, and the whole party, just now so noisy with eager talk and frequent laughter, sat breathless, looking at the reader with awe-stricken eyes as that wonderful story slowly unwound itself.

Theodore read well, in that subdued and semi-dramatic style which is best adapted to chamber-reading. He felt what he read, and the horror of the imaginary scene was vividly before his eyes as he got deeper into the story.

The reading lasted nearly two hours, but it was not one moment too long for Theodore's audience, and there was a sigh of regret when the last words of the story had been spoken.

"Well," exclaimed one young lady, "I do call that a first-class tale, don't you, Miss Newton?"

"You may go a long way without getting such a ghost tale as that," said another; "and don't the gentleman read beautifully, and don't he make one feel as if it was all going on in this very room? And the dog too! There, I never see such a thing! A poor dog to drop down dead, like that."

"I did hope that there dog would come to life again at the end," said one damsel.

By way of diversion after the story, Miss Newton opened her piano,

beckoned three of the girls over to her, and played the symphony of "Blow, Gentle Gales," which old-fashioned glee the three girls sang with taste and discretion, the bass part being altered to suit a female voice. Then came some songs, all of which Miss Newton accompanied; and then at her request Theodore read again, this time selecting Holmes' "Wonderful One-Horse Shay," which caused much laughter; after which, the little clock on the chimney-piece having struck eleven, he wished his hostess good night, selected his coat and hat from among the heap of jackets and hats on a table on the landing, and went downstairs.

He was still in Wedgewood Street when he heard light footsteps coming quickly behind him. It seemed to him that they were trying to overtake him, so he turned and met the owner of the feet.

"I beg your pardon, sir; forgive me for following you," said a very gentle voice, which he recognized as belonging to the girl called Marian—"I wanted so much to speak to you—alone."

"And I am glad of the opportunity of speaking to you," he answered. "I felt particularly interested in you this evening—there are some faces, you know, which interest us in spite of ourselves almost, and I felt that I should like to know more of you."

This was so gravely said that there was no possibility of an offensive construction being given to the words.

"You are very good, sir. It was your name that struck me," she answered, falteringly; "it is a Dorsetshire name, I think."

"Yes, it is a Dorsetshire name, and I am a Dorchester man."

"Dorchester," she repeated slowly. "I wonder whether you know a place called Cheriton?"

"I know it very well indeed. A kinsman of mine lives there. Lord Cheriton is my cousin."

"I thought as much, directly I heard your name. You must know all about that dreadful murder, then—last summer?"

"Yes, I know about as much of it as any one knows, and that is very little."

"They have not found the murderer?" she asked, with a faint shudder.

"No, nor are they ever likely to find him, I believe. But tell me why you are interested in Cheriton. Do you come from that part of the country?"

"Yes."

"Were you born in Cheriton village?"

"I was brought up not far from there," she answered, hesitatingly.

He remembered what Miss Newton had told him of her own forbearance in asking questions, and he pursued the inquiry no further.

"May I see you as far as your lodgings?" he said, kindly. "It will be very little out of my way."

"No, thank you, Mr. Dalbrook. I am too much accustomed to

going about alone ever to want any escort. Good night, and thank you for having answered my questions."

Her manner showed a disinclination to prolong the interview, and she walked away with hurried steps which carried her swiftly into the darkness.

"Poor lonely soul!" he said to himself. "Now, whose lost sheep is she, I wonder? She is certainly of a rank above a cottager's daughter, and with those hands of hers it is clear she has never been in domestic service. Not far from Cheriton! What may that mean? Not far is a vague description of locality. I must ask Lady Cheriton about her the next time I am at the Chase."

CHAPTER XVII.

"A mind not to be changed by place or time."

Christmas at Dorchester was not a period of festivity to which Theodore Dalbrook had hitherto looked forward with ardent expectations, but in this particular December he found himself longing for that holiday season even as a schoolboy might long for release from Latin Grammar and suet pudding, and for the plenteous fare and idle days of home. He longed for the grave old town with its Roman relics and leafless avenues; longed for it, alas! not so much because his father, brother, and sisters dwelt there, as because it was within a possible drive of Milbrook Priory, and once being at Dorchester he had a fair excuse for going to see his cousin. Many and many a time in his chambers at the Temple he had felt the fever-fit so strongly upon him that he was tempted to put on his hat, rush out of those quiet courts and stony quadrangles to the bustle of the Embankment, spring into the first hansom that came within hail, and so to Waterloo, and by any train that would carry him to Wareham Station, and thence to the Priory, only to look upon Juanita's face for a little while, only to hold her hand in his, once at greeting and once at parting, and then back into the night and the loneliness of his life, and law books and precedents, and Justinian and Chitty, and all that is commonplace and dry-as-dust in man's existence.

He had refrained from such foolishness, and now Christmas was at hand, his sisters were making the house odious with holly and laurel, the old cook was chopping suet for the traditional pudding

which he had loathed for the last ten years, and he had a fair excuse for driving along the frosty roads to visit his widowed cousin. He had a pressing invitation from Lord Cheriton to spend two or three days of his holiday time at the Chase, an invitation which he had promptly accepted; but his first visit was to Lady Carmichael.

He found the house in all things unlike what it had been when last he saw it. The dear Grenvilles had been persuaded to spend their Christmas in Dorsetshire, and the Priory was full of children's voices, and the traces of children's occupation. Theodore had known Jessica Grenville before her marriage, yet it was not the less a shock to find himself confronted by a portly matron and a brood of children in that room where he had seen Juanita's sad face bent over her embroidery. There was no trace of Juanita in the spacious drawing-room to-day, and the fact of her absence almost unhinged him, and put him at a disadvantage in his conversation with Mrs. Grenville, who received him with gracious loquacity, and insisted upon his giving an immediate opinion upon the different degrees of family likeness to be seen in her four children there present.

"These two are decided Carmichaels," she said, putting forward a rather flabby boy and a pudding-faced girl, "and the other two are thorough Grenvilles," indicating the latter and younger pair, who were seated on the floor building a Tower of Babel with a lately received present of bricks, and carrying out the idea by their own confusion of tongues.

Theodore felt glad he was not a Grenville if that was the type. He murmured some vague civility about the children, while he shook hands with Lady Jane, who had come forward shyly to welcome him, almost obliterated by her more loquacious daughter.

"Don't you think Johnnie the very image of his poor dear uncle?" asked Mrs. Grenville urgently, a question which always agonized Lady Jane, who could not see the faintest likeness between her snub-nosed and bilious-looking grandchild and her handsome son.

Theodore was too nervous to be conscious of his own untruthfulness in replying in the affirmative. He was anxious to have done with the children, and to hear about his cousin.

"I hope Juanita is not ill?" he said.

"Oh, no, she is pretty well," replied Lady Jane, "but we keep her as quiet as we can, and of course the children are rather trying for her——"

"Nobody can say that they are noisy children," interjected the happy mother.

"So she seldom leaves her own rooms till the evening," continued Lady Jane. "You would like to see her at once, I dare say, Mr. Dalbrook? And I know she will be pleased to see you."

She rang, and told the footman to inquire if Lady Carmichael was ready to see Mr. Dalbrook, and Theodore had to occupy the interval until the footman's return with polite attentions to the four children. He asked Lucy whence she had obtained those delightful bricks, thereby eliciting the information that the bricks were not Lucy's, but Godolphin's, only he "let her play with them," as he observed magnanimously. He was gratified with the further information that the tower now in process of elevation was not a church, but the Tower of Babel; and he was then treated to the history of that remarkable building as related in Holy Writ.

"*You* didn't know that, did you?" remarked Godolphin, boastfully, when he had finished his narration in a harsh bawl, being one of those coarse brats whom their parents boast of as after the pattern of the infant Hercules.

The footman returned before Godolphin had wrung a confession of ignorance from the nervous visitor, and Theodore darted up to follow him out of the room.

He found Juanita reclining on a low couch near the fire in a dimly-lighted room, that room which he remembered having entered only once before, on the occasion of an afternoon party at the Priory, when Sir Godfrey had taken him to his den to show him a newly acquired folio copy of Thomson's "Seasons," with the famous Bartolozzi mezzotints. It was a good old room, especially at this wintry season, when the dulness of the outlook was of little consequence. The firelight gleamed cheerily on the rich bindings of the books, and on the dark woodwork, and fondly touched Juanita's reclining figure and the rich folds of her dark plush tea-gown.

"How good of you to come to see me so soon, Theodore!" she said, giving him her hand. "I know you only came to Dorchester yesterday. The girls were here the day before, and told me they expected you."

"You did not think I should be in the county very long without finding my way here, did you, Juanita?"

"Well, no, perhaps not. I know what a true friend you are. And now tell me, have you made any further discoveries?"

"One more discovery, Juanita, as I told you briefly in my last letter. I have traced the Squire's daughter to the sad close of a most unhappy life—and so ends the Strangway family as you know of their existence—that is to say, those three Strangways who had some right to feel themselves aggrieved by the loss of the land upon which they were born."

"Tell me all you heard from Miss Newton. Your letter was brief and vague, but as I knew I was to see you at Christmas I waited for fuller details. Tell me everything, Theodore."

He obeyed her, and related the bitter, commonplace story of Evelyn Strangway's life, as told him by her old governess There

were no elements of romance in the story. It was as common as the Divorce Court or the daily papers.

"Poor creature! Well, there ends my theory, at least about her," said Juanita, gloomily. "Her brothers were dead, and she was dead, long before that fatal night. Did they bequeath their vengeance to any one else, I wonder? Who else is there in this world who had reason to hate my father or me? And I know that no creature upon this earth could have cause to hate my husband."

"In your father's calling there is always a possibility of a deadly hate, inexplicable, unknown to the subject. Remember the fate of Lord Mayo. A judge who holds the keys of life and death must make many enemies."

"Yes," she sighed, "there is that to be thought of. Oh, my dearest and best, why did you ever link your life with that of a Judge's daughter? I feel as if I had lured him to his doom. I might have foreseen the danger. I ought never to have married. What right had I? Some discharged felon lay in wait for him—some relentless, Godless, hopeless wretch—whom my father had condemned to long imprisonment—whose angry heart my father had scorched with his scathing speech. I have read some of his summings up, and they have seemed cruel, cruel, cruel—so cold, so deliberate, so like a god making light of the sins of men. Some wretch, coming maddened out of his silent cell, and seeing my husband—that white, pure life, that brave, strong youth—prosperous, honoured, happy—seeing what a good man's life can be—lay in wait like a tiger, to destroy that happy life. If it was not one of the Strangways who killed him, it must have been such a man."

Her eyes shone, and her cheeks flushed with a feverish red. Theodore took her hand, held it in both his own, and bent to kiss the cold fingers—not with a lover's ardour, fondly as he loved; but with a calm and brotherly affection which soothed her agitated heart. Her loved her well enough to be able to subjugate himself for her sake.

"My dear Juanita, if you would only withdraw your thoughts from this ghastly subject! I will not ask you to forget. That may be impossible. I entreat you only to be patient, to leave the chastisement of crime to Providence, which works in the dark, works silently, inevitably, to the end for which we can only grope in a lame and helpless fashion. Be sure the murderer will stand revealed sooner or later. That cruel murder will not be his last crime, and in his next act of violence he may be less fortunate in escaping every human eye. Or if that act is to be the one solitary crime of his life something will happen to betray him—some oversight of his own, or some irrepressible movement of a guilty conscience will give his life to the net, as a bird flies into a trap. I

beseech you, dear, let your thoughts dwell upon less painful subjects —for your own sake—for the sake——"

He faltered, and left his sentence unfinished, and Juanita knew that his sisters had told him something. She knew that the one hope of her blighted life, hope which she had hardly recognized as hope yet awhile, was known to him.

"I can never cease to think of that night, or to pray that God will avenge that crime," she said, firmly. "You think that is an unchristian prayer perhaps, but what does the Scripture say? 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' Christ came to confirm that righteous law. Oh! it is well to be a humanitarian—to sign petitions against capital punishment,—but let your nearest and dearest be murdered, and you will be quick to recognize the justice of that old inexorable law—a life for a life. That is what *I* want, Theodore—the life of the man who killed my husband."

"If I can help to bring about that end, Juanita, believe me that I will not shrink from the task; but at present I must own that I am off the track, and see no likelihood of succeeding where a trained detective has failed. Could I but find a shred of evidence to put me on the trail, I would pursue that clue to the bitter end; but so far all is dark."

"Yes, all is dark!" she answered, dejectedly; and then, after a pause, she said, "You are going to stay at Cheriton, I hear?"

"I am to spend three days there at the turn of the year, just before I go back to London. I have chambers in Ferret-court, over the rooms in which your father spent the golden years of his youth, the years that made him a great man. It will be very interesting to me to hear him talk over those years, if I can beguile him into talking of himself, a subject which he so seldom dwells upon."

"Ask him if he ever made a bitter enemy. Ask him for his experience as a Judge at Assizes—find out, if you can, whether he ever provoked the hatred of a bad vindictive man."

"I will question your father, Juanita."

"Do! He will not let me talk to him about the one subject that occupies my mind. He always stops me on the threshold of any inquiries. He might surely help me to find the murderer, with his highly trained intellect, with his experience of the darkest side of human nature. But he will not help me. He would talk more freely to you, no doubt."

"I will sound him," answered Theodore, and then he tried to beguile her into talking of other things—her home, her surroundings.

"It must be a comfort to you to have Lady Jane."

"A comfort! She is all that I have of happiness—all that reminds me of Godfrey. My mother and father are very dear to me—I hope you believe that, Theodore?—but our lives are parted now. My

mother is wrapped up in her husband. Neither of them can sympathize with me as *his* mother can. Their loss is not the same as ours. We two are one in our grief."

"And she is a buffer between you and the outer world, I see. She bears the burdens that would weigh you down. Those children, for instance—no doubt they are charming, as children go; but I fancy they would worry you if you had too much of them."

"They would kill me," said Juanita, smiling at him for the first time in their interview. "I am not very fond of children. It sounds unwomanly to say so, but I often find myself wishing they could be born grown up. Fortunately, Lady Jane adores them. And I am glad to have the Grenvilles at Christmas time. I want all things to be as they would have been were my dearest here. I lie here and look round this room, which was his, and think and think, and think of him till I almost fancy he is here. Idle fancy! Mocking dream! Oh! if you knew how often I dream that he is living still, and that I am still his happy wife. I dream that he has been dead—or at least that we have all believed that he was dead—but that it was a mistake. He is alive; our own for long years to come. The wild rapture of that dream wakes me, and I know that I am alone. God keep you, Theodore, from such a loss as mine!"

"I must gain something before I can lose it," he answered, with a shade of bitterness. "I see myself, as the years go on, hardening into a lonely old bachelor, outliving the capacity for human affection."

"That is nonsense-talk. You think so just now, perhaps. There is no one beyond your own family you care for, and you fancy yourself shut out from the romance of life—but your day will come, very suddenly, perhaps. You will see some one whom you can care for. Love will enter your life unawares, and will fill your heart and mind, and the ambition that absorbs you now will seem a small thing."

"Never, Juanita. I don't mean to plague you with any trouble of mine. You have given me your friendship, and I hope to be worthy of it; but pray do not talk to me of the chances of the future. My future is bounded by the hope of getting on at the Bar. If I fail in that I fail in everything."

"You will not fail. There is no reason you should not prosper in your profession as my father prospered. I often think that you are like him—more like him than you are like your own father."

Their talk touched on various subjects after this—on the great events of the world, the events that make history—on books and theatres, and then upon Sarah Newton, whose plan of life interested Juanita.

He told her of the girl called Marian, and her inquiries about Cheriton.

"I wonder if you ever knew her among your villagers," he said.

"I should much like to know who she is. She interests me more than I can say. There is a refinement in her manners and appearance that convinces me she must have belonged to superior people. She was never born in a labourer's cottage, or amidst a small shopkeeper's shabby surroundings. She was never taught at a National School, or broken into domestic service."

"And she was once very handsome, you say?"

"Yes, she must have been beautiful, before illness and trouble set their marks upon her face. She is only a wreck now, but there is beauty in the wreck."

"How old do you suppose her to be?"

"Eight or nine and twenty. It is difficult to guess a woman's age within two or three years, and this woman's face is evidently aged by trouble; but I don't think she can be thirty."

"There is only one person I can think of who would in any manner answer your description," said Juanita, thoughtfully.

"Who is that?"

"Mercy Porter. You must have heard about Mercy Porter, the daughter of the woman at the West Lodge."

"Yes, yes, I remember. She ran away with a middle-aged man—an army man—one of your father's visitors."

"I was a child at the time, and of course I heard very little about it. I only knew that Mercy Porter who used to come to tea with mother, and who played the piano better than my governess, suddenly vanished out of our lives, and that I never saw her again. My mother was quite fond of her, and I remember hearing of her beauty, though I was too young myself to know what beauty meant. I could not think any one pretty who wore such plain frocks, and such stout useful boots as Mercy wore. Her mother certainly did nothing to set off her good looks, or to instil vanity. Years after, my mother told me how the girl disappeared one summer evening, and how Mrs. Porter came distracted to the house, and saw my father, and stormed and raved at him in her agony, saying it was *his* friend who had blighted her daughter's youth—*his* work that she had gone to her ruin. He was very patient and forbearing with her, my mother said, for he pitied her despair, and he felt that he was in some wise to blame for having brought such an unprincipled man as Colonel Tremaine to Cheriton, a man who had carried ruin into many homes. Mercy had been seen to leave Wareham Station with him by the night mail. He had a yacht at Weymouth. She wrote to her mother from London a fortnight afterwards, and Mrs. Porter brought the letter to my mother and father one morning, as they sat at breakfast. It was a heartbroken letter—the letter of a poor foolish girl who flings away her good name and her hope of Heaven, with her eyes open, and knows the cost of her sacrifice, and yet can't help making it. I was engaged to Godfrey when I first heard

Mercy's story, and I felt so sorry for her, so sorry, in the midst of my happy love. What had I done to deserve happiness more than she, that life should be so bright for me and so dark for her. I did not know that my day of agony was to come."

"Did you ever hear how Colonel Tremaine treated her?"

"No; I believe my father wrote him a very severe letter, and called upon him to repair the wrong he had done; but I don't think he even took so much trouble as to answer that letter. His regiment was ordered off to India two or three years afterwards, and he was killed in Afghanistan about six years ago."

"And has nothing been heard of Mercy since her flight?"

"Nothing."

"I wonder her mother has sat at home quietly all these years instead of making strenuous efforts to find her lost lamb," said Theodore.

"Ah, that is almost exactly what Godfrey said of her. He seemed to think her heartless for taking things so quietly. She is a curious woman—self-contained, and silent. I sometimes fancy she was more angry than grieved at Mercy's fate. Mother says she turns to ice at the slightest mention of the girl's name. Don't you think love would show itself differently?"

"One can never be sure about other people's sentiments. Love has many languages."

Their talk drifted to more commonplace subjects. And then Theodore rose to take leave.

"You must dine at the Priory before your holiday is over, Theo," said his cousin, as they shook hands. "Let me see—to-morrow will be Christmas Day—will you come the day after, and bring the sisters? It is too long a drive for a winter night, so you must stay; there is plenty of room."

"Are you sure we shall not bore you?"

"I am sure you will cheer me. My sister-in-law is very good—but Lady Jane is the only person in this house of whom I do not get desperately tired, including myself," she added, with a sigh. "Please say you will come, and I will order your rooms."

"We will come then. Good night, Juanita."

The shadows were falling as he drove away, after refusing tea in the drawing-room and a further acquaintance with the wonderful children.

He looked forward to that evening at the Priory with an eager expectancy that he knew to be supreme foolishness, and when the evening came, it brought some measure of disappointment with it. Juanita was not so well as she had been upon Christmas Eve. She was not able to dine downstairs, and the family dinner, at which the Etonian Tom, Johnnie, and Lucy were allowed to take their places in virtue of Christmas time, was a dull business for Theodore. His

only pleasure was in the fact that he sat on Lady Jane's right hand, and was able to talk with her of Juanita. Even that pleasure was alloyed with keenest pain; for Lady Jane's talk was of that dead love which cast its shadow over Juanita's youth, or of that dim and dawning hope which might brighten the coming days—and neither in the love of the past nor in the love of the future had Theodore any part. Juanita was on her sofa by the drawing-room fire when he and Mr. Grenville left the dining-room, after a single glass of claret, and a brief review of the political situation. Theodore's sisters were established on each side of her. There was no chance for him while they were absorbing her attention, and he retired disconsolately to the group in the middle of the room, where Mrs. Grenville and Lady Jane were seated on a capacious ottoman with the children about them.

Johnnie and Lucy, who had over-eaten themselves, were disposed to be quiet, the little girl leaning her fair curls and fat shining cheek against her grandmother's shoulder with an air that looked touching, but which really indicated repletion; Johnnie sprawling on the carpet at his mother's feet, and wishing he had not eaten *that* mince-pie, telling himself that, on the whole, he hated mince-pie, and envying his brother Tom, who had stolen off to the saddle-room to talk to the grooms. Godolphin and Mabel having dined early, were full of exuberance, waiting to be "jumped," which entertainment Theodore had to provide without intermission for nearly half an hour, upheaving first one and then another towards the ceiling, first a rosy bundle in ruby velvet, and then a rosy bundle in white muslin, laughing, screaming, enraptured, to be caught in his arms, and set carefully on the ground, there to await the next turn. Theodore slaved at this recreation until his arms ached, casting a furtive glance every now and then at the corner by the fireplace where his sisters were treating Juanita to the result of their latest heavy reading.

At last, to his delight, Lucy recovered from her comatose condition, and began to thirst for amusement.

"Let's have magic music," she said; "we can all play at that, Granny and all. You know you love magic music, Granny. Who'll play the piano? Not mother, she plays so badly," added the darling, with childlike candour.

"Sophy shall play for you," cried Theodore; "she's a capital hand at it."

He went over to his sister.

"Go and play for the children, Sophy," he said. "I've been doing my duty. Go and do yours."

Sophy looked agonized, but complied; and he slipped into her vacant seat.

He sat by his cousin's side for nearly an hour, while the children,

mother, and grandmother played their nursery game to the sound of dance-music, now low, now loud, neatly executed by Sophy's accurate fingers. Their talk was of indifferent subjects, and the lion's share of the conversation was enjoyed by Janet; but to Theodore it was bliss to be there, by his cousin's side, within sound of her low melodious voice, within touch of her tapering hand. Just to sit there, and watch her face, and drink in the tones of her voice, was enough. He asked no more from Fate, yet awhile.

He had a long talk with her in her own room next morning, before he went back to Dorchester, and the talk was of that old subject which absorbed her thoughts.

"Be sure you find out all you can from my father," she said at parting.

Life at Cheriton Chase bore no impress of the tragedy that had blighted Juanita's honeymoon. There were no festivities this winter; there was no large house-party. There had been a few quiet elderly or middle-aged visitors during the shooting season, and there had been some slaughter of those pheasants which were wont to sit, ponderous and sleepy as barn-door fowls, upon the five-barred gates, and post-and-rail fences of the Chase. But even those sober guests—old friends of husband and wife—had all departed, and the house was empty of strangers when Theodore arrived there, in time for dinner on New Year's Eve. Nothing could have suited him better than this. He wanted to be *tête-à-tête* with Lord Cheriton; to glean all in the way of counsel or reminiscence that might fall from those wise lips.

"If there is a man living who can teach me how to get on in my profession it is James Dalbrook," he said to himself, thinking of his cousin by that name which he had so often heard his father use when talking of old days.

Lady Cheriton greeted him affectionately, made him sit by her in the library, where a richly embroidered Japanese screen made a cosy corner by the fireplace, during the twenty minutes before dinner. She was a handsome woman still, with that grand-looking Spanish beauty which does not fade with youth, and she was dressed to perfection in lustreless black silk, relieved by the glitter of jet here and there, and by the soft white crape kerchief, worn *à la* Marie-Antoinette. There was not one thread of grey in the rich black hair, piled in massive plaits upon the prettily shaped head. Theodore contemplated her with an almost worshipping admiration. It was Juanita's face he saw in those classic lines.

"I want to have a good talk with you, Theo," she said; "there is no one else to whom I can talk so freely now my poor Godfrey is gone. We sit here of an evening, now, you see. The drawing-room is only used when there are people in the house, and even

than I feel miserable there. I cannot get his image out of my mind. Cheriton insists that the room shall be used, that it shall not be made a haunted room—and no doubt it is best so,—but one cannot forget such a tragedy as that."

"I hope Juanita will forget some day."

"Ah, that is what I try to hope. She is so young, at the very beginning of life, and it does seem hard that all those hopes for which other women live should be over and done with for her. I wish I could believe in the power of Time to cure her. I wish I could believe that she will be able to love somebody else as she loved Godfrey. If she does, I dare say it will be some new person who has had nothing to do with her past life. I had been in and out of love before I met James Dalbrook, but the sight of him seemed like the beginning of a new life. I felt as if it had been pre-ordained that I was to love him, and only him—that nothing else had been real. Yes, Theodore,"—with a sigh,—"you may depend, if ever she should care for anybody, it will be a new person."

"Very lucky for the new person, and rather hard upon any one who happens to have loved her all his life."

"Is there any one—like that?"

"I think you know there is, Lady Cheriton."

"Yes, yes, my dear boy, I know," she answered kindly, laying her soft hand upon his. "I won't pretend not to know. I wish, with all my heart, you could make her care for you, Theodore, a year or two hence. You would be a good and true husband to her, a kind father to Godfrey's child—that fatherless child. Oh, Theodore, is it not sad to think of the child who will never—not for one brief hour—feel the touch of a father's hand, or know the blessing of a father's love? Such a dead blank where there should be warmth and life and joy! We must wait, Theo. Who can dispose of the future? I shall be a happy woman if ever you can tell me you have won the reward of a life's devotion."

"God bless you for your goodness to me," he faltered, kissing the soft white hand, so like in form and outline to Juanita's hand, only plumper and more matronly.

They dined snugly, a cosy trio, in a small room hung with genuine old Cordovan leather, and adorned with Moorish crockery, a room which was called her Ladyship's parlour, and which had been one of Lord Cheriton's birthday gifts to his wife, furnished and decorated during her absence at a German spa. When Lady Cheriton left them, the two men turned their chairs towards the fire, lighted their cigars, and settled themselves for an evening's talk.

The great lawyer was in one of his pleasantest moods. He gave Theodore the benefit of his experience as a stuff-gown, and did all that the advice of a wise senior can do towards putting a tyro on the right track.

"You will have to bide your time," he said in conclusion; "it is a tedious business. You must just sit in your chambers and read till your chance comes. Always be there, that's the grand point. Don't be out when Fortune knocks at your door. She will come in a very insignificant shape on her earlier visits—with a shabby little two-guinea brief in her hand; but don't you let that shabby little brief be carried to somebody else just because you are out of the way. I suppose you are really fond of the law."

"Yes, I am very fond of my profession. It is meat and drink to me."

"Then you will get on. Any man of moderate abilities is bound to succeed in any profession which he loves with a heart-whole love; and your abilities are much better than moderate."

There was a little pause in the talk while Lord Cheriton threw on a fresh log and lighted a second cigar.

"I have been meditating a good deal upon Sir. Godfrey's murder," said Theodore, "and I am perplexed by the utter darkness which surrounds the murderer and his motive. No doubt you have some theory upon the subject."

"No, I have no theory. There is really nothing upon which to build a theory. Churton, the detective, talked about a vendetta—suggested poacher, tenant, tramp, gipsy, any member of the dangerous classes who might happen to consider himself aggrieved by poor Godfrey. He even went so far as to make a very unpleasant suggestion, and urged that there might be a woman at the bottom of the business, speculated upon some youthful intrigue of Godfrey's. Now, from all I know of that young man, I believe his life had been blameless. He was the soul of honour. He would never have dealt cruelly with any woman."

"And you, Lord Cheriton," said Theodore, hardly following the latter part of his cousin's speech in his self-absorption.

His kinsman started and looked at him indignantly.

"And you—in your capacity of judge, for instance—have you never made a deadly foe?"

"Well, I suppose the men and women I have sentenced have hardly loved me; but I doubt if the worst of them ever had any strong personal feeling about me. They have taken me as a part of the machinery of the law—of no more account than the iron door of a cell or a beam of the scaffold."

"Yet there have been instances of active malignity—the assassination of Lord Mayo, for instance."

"Oh, the assassin in that case was an Indian, and a maniac. We live in a different latitude. Besides, it is rather too far-fetched an idea to suppose that a man would shoot my son-in-law in order to avenge himself upon me."

"The shot may have been fired under a misapprehension. The

figure seated reading in the lamplight may have been mistaken for you."

"The assassin must have been uncommonly short-sighted to make such a mistake. I won't say such a thing would be impossible, for experience has taught me that there is nothing in this life too strange to be true; but it is too unlikely a notion to dwell upon. Indeed, I think, Theodore, we must dismiss this painful business from our minds. If the mystery is ever to be cleared up, it will be by a fluke; but even that seems to me a very remote contingency. Have you not observed that if a murderer is not caught within three months of his crime he is hardly ever caught at all? I might almost say if he is not caught within one month. Once let the scent cool and the chances are a hundred to one in his favour."

"Yet Juanita has set her heart upon seeing her husband avenged."

"Ah, that is where her Spanish blood shows itself. An Englishwoman, pure and simple, would think only of her sorrow. My poor girl hungers for revenge. Providence may favour her, perhaps, but I doubt it. The best thing that can happen to her will be to forget her first husband, fine young fellow as he was, and choose a second. It is horrible to think that the rest of her life is to be a blank. With her beauty and position she may look high. I am obliged to be ambitious for my daughter, you see, Theodore, since Heaven has not spared me a son."

Theodore saw only too plainly that, whatever favour his hopes might have from soft-hearted Lady Cheriton, his own kinsman, James Dalbrook, would be against him. This mattered very little to him at present, in the face of the lady's indifference. One gleam of hope from Juanita herself would have seemed more to him than all the favour of parents or kindred. It was her hand that held his fate: it was she alone who could make his life blessed.

New Year's Day was fine but frosty, a sharp, clear day on which Cheriton Park looked loveliest, the trees made fairy-like by the light rime, the long stretches of turf touched with a silvery whiteness, the distant copses and boundary of pine-trees half hidden in a pale grey mist.

Theodore walked across the park with Lady Cheriton to the eleven o'clock service in the church at the end of Cheriton village. It was nearly a mile from the great house to the fine old fifteenth-century church, but Lady Cheriton always walked to church in decent weather, albeit her servants were conveyed there luxuriously in a capacious omnibus specially retained for their use. On the way along the silent avenue Theodore told her of his meeting with Miss Newton's *protégée*, and of Juanita's idea that the woman called Marian might be no other than Mercy Porter.

"I certainly remember no other case of a girl about here leaving her home under disgraceful circumstances—that is to say, any girl

of refinement and education," said Lady Cheriton. "There have been cases among the villagers, no doubt; but if this girl of yours is really a superior person, and really comes from Cheriton, I think Juanita is right, and that you must have stumbled upon Mercy Porter. Her mother ought to be told about it, without delay."

"Will you tell her, or will you put me in the way of doing so?"

"Would you like to see Mrs. Porter?"

"Yes. I feel interested in her, chiefly because she may be Marian's mother. I shall have to go to work very carefully, so as not to cause her too keen a disappointment in the event of Juanita's guess being wrong."

"I do not know that you will find her very soft-hearted where her daughter is concerned," replied Lady Cheriton, thoughtfully. "I sometimes fear that she has hardened herself against that unhappy girl. The troubles of her own early life may have hardened her, perhaps. It is not easy to bear a long series of troubles with patience and gentleness."

"Do you know much of her history?"

"Only that she lost her husband when she was still a young woman, and that she was left to face the world penniless with her young daughter. If my husband had not happened to hear of her circumstances, Heaven knows what would have become of her. He had been intimate with her husband when he was a young man in London, and it seemed to him a duty to do what he could for her; so he pensioned off an old gardener who used to live in that pretty cottage, and he had the cottage thoroughly renovated for Mrs. Porter. She had a little furniture of a rather superior kind warehoused in London, and with this she was able to make a snug and pretty home for herself, as you will see, if you call upon her after the service. You are sure to see her at church."

"Was she very fond of her little girl in those days?"

"I hardly know. People have different ways of showing affection. She was very strict with poor Mercy. She educated her at home, and never allowed her to associate with any of the village children. She kept the child entirely under her own wing, so that the poor little thing had actually no companion but her mother, a middle-aged woman, saddened by trouble. I felt very sorry for the child, and I used to have her up at the house for an afternoon now and then, just to introduce some variety into her life. When she grew up into a beautiful young woman, her mother seemed to dislike these visits, and stipulated that Mercy should only come to see me when there were no visitors in the house. She did not want her head turned by any of those foolish compliments which frivolous people are so fond of paying to a girl of that age, never thinking of the mischief they may do. I told her that I thought she was

over-careful, and that as Mercy must discover that she was handsome sooner or later, it was just as well she should gain some experience of life at once. Her instinctive self-respect would teach her how to take care of herself; and if she could be safe anywhere, she would be safe with me. Mrs. Porter is a rather obstinate person, and she took her own way. She kept Mercy as close as if she had been an Oriental slave; and yet, somehow, Colonel Tremaine contrived to make love to her, and tempted her away from her home. Perhaps, if that home had been a little less dismal, the girl might not have been so easily tempted."

They had left the park by this time and were nearing the church. A scanty congregation came slowly in after Lady Cheriton and her companion had taken their seats in the chancel pew. The congregation was chiefly feminine. Middle-aged women in every-day bonnets and fur-trimmed cloaks, with their shoulders up to their ears. Girls in felt hats and smart, tight-fitting jackets. A few pious villagers of advanced years, spectacled, feeble, with wrinkled faces half hidden under poke bonnets: two representative old men with long white hair and quavering voices, whose shrill treble was distinguishable above the rustic choir.

Amidst this sparse congregation Theodore had no difficulty in discovering Mrs. Porter.

She sat in one of the front benches on the left side of the aisle, which side was reserved for the tradespeople and humbler inhabitants of Cheriton; while the benches on the right were occupied by the county people, and some small fry who ranked with those elect of the earth—with them, but not of them—a retired banker and his wife, the village doctor, the village lawyer, and two or three female annuitants of good family.

A noticeable woman, this Mrs. Porter, anywhere. She was tall and thin, straight as a dart, with strongly marked features and white hair. Her complexion was pale and sallow, the kind of skin which is generally described as sickly. If she had ever been handsome, all traces of that former beauty had disappeared. It was a hard face, without womanly charm, yet with an unmistakable air of refinement. She wore her neat little black straw bonnet and black cloth mantle like a lady, and she walked like a lady, as Theodore saw presently, when that portion of the little band of worshippers which did not remain for the celebration dribbled slowly out of church.

He left Lady Cheriton kneeling in her pew, and followed Mrs. Porter out of the porch and along the village street, and thence into that rustic lane which led to the West Lodge. He had spoken to her only once in his life, on a summer morning, when he had happened to find her standing at her garden gate, and when it had been impossible for her to avoid him. He knew that she must have seen him going in and out of the park gates often enough for

his appearance to be familiar to her, so he had no scruple in introducing himself.

"Good morning, Mrs. Porter," he said, overtaking her in the deeply sunk lane, between those rocky banks where hart's-tongue and polypodium grew so luxuriantly in summer, and where even in this wintry season the lichens and mosses spread their rich colouring over grey stone and brown earth, and above which the snow-laden boughs showed white against the blue brightness of the sky.

She turned and bowed stiffly.

"Good morning, sir."

"You haven't forgotten me, I hope. I am Theodore Dalbrook, of Dorchester. I think you must have seen me pass your window too often to forget me easily?"

"I am not much given to watching the people who pass in and out, sir. When his Lordship gave me the cottage, he was good enough to allow me a servant to open the park gate, as he knew that I was not strong enough to bear exposure to all kinds of weather. I am free to live my own life therefore, without thinking of his Lordship's visitors."

"I am sorry to intrude myself upon your notice, Mrs. Porter, but I want to speak to you upon a very delicate subject, and I must ask your forgiveness in advance if I should touch upon an old wound."

She looked at him curiously, shrinkingly even, with a latent anger in her pale eyes, eyes that had been lovely once, perhaps, but which time or tears had faded to a glassy dulness.

"I have no desire to discuss old wounds with any one," she said coldly. "My troubles at least are my own."

"Not altogether your own, Mrs. Porter. The sorrow of which I am thinking involves another life—the life of one who has been dear to you."

"I have nothing to do with any other life."

"Not even with the life of your only child?"

'Not even with the life of my only child," she answered doggedly. "She left me of her own accord, and I have done with her for ever. I stand utterly alone in this world—utterly alone," she repeated.

"And if I tell you that I think and believe I have found your daughter in London—very poor—working for her living, very sad and lonely, her beauty faded, her life joyless—would you not wish to know more—would not your heart yearn towards her?"

"No! I tell you I have done with her. She has passed out of my life. I stand alone."

There was a tone of finality in these words which left no room for argument.

Theodore lifted his hat, and walked on.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"O sovereign power of love! O grief! O balm!
All records, saving thine, come cool, and calm,
And shadowy, through the mist of passèd years."

HARRINGTON DALBROOK, having in a manner given hostages to Fortune, entered upon his new career with a strength of purpose and a resolute industry which took his father by surprise.

"Upon my word, Harry, I did not think there was so much grit in you," said Mr. Dalbrook. "I thought you and your sisters were too much stuffed with modern culture to be capable of old-fashioned work."

"I hope, my dear father, you don't think education and intellect out of place in a lawyer?"

"Far from it. We have had too many examples to the contrary, from Bacon to Brougham, from Hale to Cockburn; but I was afraid of the dilettante spirit, the talk about books which you had only half read, the smattering of subjects that need the work of a lifetime to be properly understood. I was afraid of our modern electro-plate culture—the process which throws a brilliant film of education over a foundation of ignorance. However, you have surprised me, Harry. I own that I was disappointed by your want of purpose at the University; but I begin to respect you now I find you attack your work in the right spirit."

"I want to get on," answered Harrington, gravely, hanging his head a little in shame at his own reticence.

From so good a father he felt it was a kind of disbonour to keep a secret; but Juliet Baldwin had insisted upon secrecy, and the name of every *fiancée* in the early stages of an engagement is She-who-must-be-obeyed.

Harrington said not a word, therefore, as to that mighty prime-mover which was urging him to dogged perseverance in a profession for which he had as yet no real inclination. He put aside Darwin and Spencer, Max Müller and Seeley, Schopenhauer and Hartmann, all those true or false lights which he had followed through the mazes of free thought; and he set himself to master the stern actualities of the law. He had not done well at the University; not because he was wanting in brains, but because he was wanting

in concentration and doggedness. The prime-mover being supplied, and of a prodigious power, Harrington brought his intellectual forces to bear upon a given point, and made a rapid advance in legal knowledge and acumen. The old cook-housekeeper complained of the coals and candles which "Master Harry" consumed during his after-midnight studies, and wondered that the household were not all burnt in their beds by reason of the young gentleman dropping off to sleep over Coke upon Littleton. The sisters complained that they had now practically no brother, since Harrington, who had a pretty tenor voice, and had hitherto been a star at afternoon teas and evening parties, refused to go anywhere, except to those few houses—county—where Miss Baldwin might be met.

Scarcely had the New Year begun when Miss Baldwin went off upon a visit to one of the largest houses in Wiltshire, and one of the smartest, a house under the dominion of a childless widow, gifted with a large income and a sympathetic temperament, a lady who allowed her life to be influenced and directed by a family of nephews and nieces, and whose house was declared by the advanced section of society to be "quite the most perfect house to stay in, don't you know."

Miss Baldwin did not leave the neighbourhood of Dorchester and her lover without protestations of regret. The thing was a bore, a sacrifice on her part, but it must be done. She had promised dear old Lady Burdenshaw ages ago, and to Lady Burdenshaw's she must go.

"You needn't worry about it," she said, with her off-hand air, lolling on the billiard-room settee in the grey winter afternoon, on the second Sunday of the year; "if you are at all keen upon being at Medlow Court while I am there, I'll make dear old Lady Burdenshaw send you an invitation."

"You are very good," replied Harrington, "and I should like staying in the same house with you; but I couldn't think of visiting a lady I don't know, or of cadging for an invitation."

Sir Henry had asked his friend to luncheon, and now, after a somewhat Spartan meal of roast mutton and rice pudding, the lovers were alone in the billiard-room, Sir Henry having crept off to the stables. The table was kept rigorously covered on Sundays, in deference to the Dowager's Sabbatarian leanings; and there was nothing for her son to do in the billiard-room, except to walk listlessly up and down and stare at some very dingy examples of the early Italian school, or to take the cues out of the rack one by one to see which of them wanted topping.

"Oh, but you needn't mind. You would be capital friends with Lady B. We all call her Lady B., because a three-syllable name is too much for anybody's patience. I tell her she ought to drop a syllable. Lady Bur'shaw would do just as well. I suppose, though,

if I were to get an invitation you could hardly be spared from—the shop," concluded Juliet, with a laugh.

"Hardly. I have to stick very close to—the shop," replied Harrington, blushing a little at the word. "Remember what I am working for—a family practice in London and a house that you need not be ashamed to inhabit. To me that means as much as the red ribbon of the Bath means to a soldier or sailor. My ambition goes no further, unless it were to a seat in Parliament later on."

"You are a good earnest soul. Yes, of course, you must go into Parliament. In spite of all the riff-raff that has got into the House of late years, boys, Home Rulers, city-men, there is a faint flavour of distinction in the letters M.P. after a man's name. It helps him just a little in society to be able to talk about 'my constituents,' and to contemplate European politics from the standpoint of the town that has elected him. Yes, you must be in the House, by-and-by, Harry."

"You told me you were tired of country house visiting," said Harrington, who for the first time since his betrothal felt somewhat inclined to quarrel with his divinity.

"So I am, heartily sick of it; and I shall rejoice when I have a snug little nest of my own in Clarges or Hertford Street. But you must admit that Medlow Court is better than this house. Behold our average Sunday! Roast mutton—rice pudding—and invincible dulness; all the servants except an under-footman gone to afternoon church, and no possibility of a cup of tea till nearly six o'clock. A cold dinner at eight, and family prayers at ten."

"What kind of a Sunday do you have at Medlow?"

"*Il y'en a pour tous les gouts.* Medlow is liberty hall. If we were even to take it into our heads to have family prayers Lady Burdenshaw would send for her chaplain—pluck him out of the bosom of his family—and order him to read them. She doesn't *like* cards on a Sunday, because of the servants; but after the clock has struck eleven we may do what we please—play poker, nap, euchre, baccarat, till daylight, if we are in the humour. The billiard and smoke rooms, and the ball-room are at one end of the house, ever so far from the servants' quarters. We can have as much fun as we like while those rustic souls are snoring."

Harrington sighed ever so faintly. This picture of a fashionable interior was perfectly innocent, and his betrothed's way of looking at things meant nothing worse than girlish exuberance, fine animal spirits: but the *sans gêne* of Medlow Court was hardly the kind of training he would have chosen for his future wife. And then he looked at the handsome profile, the piled-up mass of ruddy-brown hair on the top of the haughtily poised head, the perfectly fitting tailor gown, with its aristocratic simplicity, costing so much more

than plebeian silks and satins; and he told himself that he was privileged in having won such exalted beauty to ally itself with his humble fortunes. Such a girl would shine as a duchess; and if marriageable dukes had eyes to see with, and judgment to guide their choice, that lovely auburn head would ere now have been crowned with a tiara of family diamonds instead of waiting for the poor sprigs of orange blossom which alone may adorn the brow of the solicitor's bride.

"Shall we go for a stroll in the grounds?" asked Juliet, with a restless air and an impatient shiver. "Perhaps it will be warmer out of doors than it is here. We keep such miserable fires in this house. I believe the grates were chosen with a view to burning the minimum of coal."

"I shall be delighted."

Laura was absent on a visit to Yorkshire cousins, strong-minded like herself, and with no pretensions to fashion. Lady Baldwin had retired for her afternoon siesta. On Sundays she always read herself to sleep with Taylor or South; on week-days she nodded over the morning paper. She had gone to the morning-room with the idea that Henry would take his friend to the stables, and that Juliet would require no looking after. It had never entered into her ladyship's head that her handsome daughter would look so low as the son of her solicitor. Juliet was therefore free to do what she pleased with her afternoon, and her pleasure was to walk in the chilly shrubberies, and the bare grey park, sparsely timbered, and with about as little forestal beauty as a gentleman's park can possess.

She put on an old seal-skin jacket and a toque to match, which she kept in the room where her brother kept his overcoats, and which smelt of tobacco, after the manner of everything that came within Sir Henry's influence. And then she led the way to a half-glass door, which opened on a grass-plot at the side of the house, and she and her lover went out.

"You can smoke if you like," she said. "You know I don't mind. I'll have a cigarette with you in the shrubbery."

"Dearest Juliet, I can't tell you how glad I should be if you would smoke—less," he said nervously, blushing at his own earnestness.

"You think I smoke too many cigarettes—that they are really bad for me?" she asked carelessly.

"It isn't that. I wasn't thinking about their effect on your health; but—I know you will call it old-fashioned nonsense—I can't bear to see the woman who is to be my wife with a cigarette between her lips."

"And when I am your wife, I suppose you will cut me off from tobacco altogether."

"I should never be a domestic tyrant, Juliet; but it would wound

me to see my wife smoke, just as much as it wounds me now when I see you smoke half a dozen cigarettes in succession."

"What a Philistine you are, Harry! Well, you shall not be tortured. I'll ease off the smoking if I can—but a whiff or two of an Egyptian soothes me when my nerves are overstrained. You are as bad as my mother, who thinks cigarette smoking one stage on the road to perdition, and rather an advanced stage, too. You are very easily shocked, Harry, if an innocent little cigarette can shock you. I wonder if you are really fond of me, now the novelty of our engagement has worn off?"

"I am fonder of you every day I live."

"Enthusiastic boy! If that is true, you may be able to stand a worse shocker than my poor little cigarette."

Harrington turned pale, but he took the hand which she held out to him, and grasped it firmly. What was she going to tell him?

"Harry, I want to make a financial statement. I want you to help me, if you can. I am up to my eyes in debt."

"In debt?"

"Yes. It sounds bad, don't it? Debt and tobacco should be exclusively masculine vices. I owe money all round—not large sums—but the sum-total is large. I have had to hold my own in smart houses upon an allowance which some women would spend with their shoemaker. My mother gives me a hundred and twenty-five pounds a year for everything, tips, travelling expenses, clothes, music—and I am not going to say anything unkind about her on that score, for I don't see how she could give me more. Her own means come to something under eighteen hundred a year, and she has this place to keep up. Henry takes all the rents, and often keeps her waiting for her income, which is a first charge upon the estate. If it were not for your father, who looks after her interests as sharply as he can, she might fare much worse. Henry brings as many men as he likes here, and contributes nothing to the housekeeping."

"And you owe money to milliners and people?" said Harrington, deeply distressed by his sweetheart's humiliation, which he felt more keenly than the lady herself.

Juliet had lived among girls who talked freely of their debts and difficulties, of sops to Cerberus, and getting round an unwilling dressmaker. Harrington's lines had been set among old-fashioned countrified people, to whom debt—and especially feminine indebtedness—meant disgrace. He had come back from the University feeling like a murderer, because he had exceeded his allowance.

"Milliners, dressmakers, shoemakers, hatters—and ever so many more. I am afraid I have been rather reckless—only—I thought——"

"I thought I should make a great match," she would have said,

had she followed her idea to its close, but she checked herself abruptly, and cut off a sprig of yew with a swing of the stick she carried.

"If I can help you in any way——" began Harrington.

"My dear boy, there is only one way in which you can help me. Lend me any money you can spare, say fifty pounds, and I will give it you back by instalments of ten or fifteen pounds a quarter. It would be mockery for me to pretend I could pay you in a lump sum, now I have told you the extent of my income."

Harrington's worldly wealth at that moment was something under fifty pounds. His father had given him a cheque for fifty on Christmas Eve, and he had no right to expect anything more till Lady Day; while he had to think of the black horse who was steadily eating his head off at livery, and for whom nothing had been paid as yet.

He could not find it in his heart to tell his affianced that he was, comparatively speaking, a pauper. He knew that his father had the reputation of wealth, a man always ready to invest in any odd parcel of land that was in the market, and who was known to possess a good many small holdings and houses in his native town and its neighbourhood. Could he tell her that her future husband was still in leading-strings, and that the run of his teeth and fifty pounds a quarter were all he could count upon till he was out of his articles? No; he would rather perish than reveal these despicable facts; so, although he had only forty-three pounds odd in his little cash-box, he told her that he would let her have fifty pounds in a day or two.

"If you could manage to bring it me to-morrow I should be very glad," said Juliet, who, once having broken the ice, talked about the loan with easy frankness. "I must have a new frock for the ball at Medlow. They are to have a ball on the first of February, the ball of the year. There will be no end of smart people. I want to send Estelle Dawson thirty-five or forty pounds, about half the amount of her last bill. It's a paltry business altogether. I know girls who owe their dressmakers hundreds where I owe tens. Let me have the cash to-morrow if you can, there's a dear. Miss Dawson is sure to be full of work for the country at this season, and she won't make my frock unless I give her a week's notice."

"Of course, dear, yes, you shall have the money," Harrington answered nervously; "but your white gown at our ball looked lovely. Why shouldn't you wear that at Medlow?"

"My white gown would be better described as black," retorted the young lady with marked acidity. "If I didn't hate the Dorchester people like poison I wouldn't have insulted them by wearing such a rag. I would no more appear in it at Medlow than I would cut my throat."

Language so strong as this forbade argument. Harrington concluded that there was a mystery in these things outside the limits of masculine understanding. To his eye the white satin and tulle his betrothed had worn had seemed faultless; but it may be that the glamour of first love acts like limelight upon a soiled white garment: and no doubt Miss Baldwin's gown had seen service.

He walked back to the house with her, and left her at the door just as it was growing dusk, and the servants were coming home from church. He left her with a fictitious appearance of cheerfulness, promising to go to tea on the following afternoon.

He was glad of the six-mile walk to Dorchester, as it gave him solitude for deliberation. At home the keen eyes of his sisters would be upon him, and he would be pestered by inquiries as to what there had been for lunch and what Miss Baldwin wore; while the still more penetrating gaze of his father would be quick to perceive anything amiss.

"Oh, Juliet, if you knew how hard you are making our engagement to me!" he ejaculated mentally, as he walked, with the unconscious hurry of an agitated mind, along the frost-bound road.

There had been a hard frost since Christmas, and hunting had been out of the question, whereby the existence of Mahmud, and the bill at the livery stable seemed so much the heavier a burden.

Somehow or other he must get the difference between forty-three pounds and fifty, only seven pounds, a paltry sum, no doubt; but it would hardly do for him to leave himself penniless until Lady Day. He might be called on at any moment for small sums. Short of shamming illness and stopping in bed till the end of the quarter, he could not possibly escape the daily calls which every young man has upon his purse. He told himself, therefore, that he must contrive to borrow fifteen or twenty pounds. But of whom? That was the question.

His first thought was naturally of his brother—but in the next moment he remembered how Theodore in his financial arrangements with his father had insisted upon cutting himself down to the very lowest possible allowance.

"You will pay all my fees, Dad, and give me enough money to furnish my chambers decently, with the help of the things I am to have out of this house, and you will allow me so much," he said, naming a very modest sum, "for maintenance till I begin to get briefs. I want to feel the spur of poverty. I want to work for my bread. Of course I know I have a court of appeal here if my exchequer should run dry."

Remembering this, Harrington felt that he could not, at the very beginning of things, pester his brother for a loan. The same

court of appeal, the father's well-filled purse, was open to him; but he had no excuse to offer, no reason to give, for exceeding his allowance.

He might sell Mahmud, if there were not two obstacles to that transaction. The first that nobody in the neighbourhood wanted to buy him, the second that he was not yet paid for, except by that bill which rose like a pale blue spectre before the young man's eyes as he was dropping off to sleep of a night, and sometimes spoiled his rest. He would have to sell Mahmud in order not to dishonour that bill; and if the horse should fetch considerably less than the price given for him, as all equine experience led his owner to fear, whence was to come the difference? That was the problem which would have to be solved somehow before the tenth of March. He would have to send the beast to Tattersall's most likely, the common experience of the hunting field having taught him that nobody ever sells a horse among his own circle. He saw himself realizing something under fifty pounds as the price of the black, and having to bridge over the distance between that amount and eighty as best he might. But March was not to-morrow, and he had first of all to provide for to-morrow; a mere trifle, but it would have to be borrowed, and the sensation of borrowing was new to Matthew Dalbrook's son. He had frittered away his ready money at the University, and he had got into debt; but he had never borrowed money of Jew or Gentile. And now the time had come when he must borrow of whomsoever he could.

He took tea with his sisters in the good, homely, old-fashioned drawing-room, which was at its best in winter; the four tall, narrow windows closely curtained, a roaring fire in the wide iron grate, and a modern Japanese tea-table wheeled in front of it. Five o'clock tea was of a more substantial order on Sundays than on week-days, on account of the nine o'clock supper which took the place of the seven o'clock dinner, and accommodated those who cared to attend evening church. Lady Baldwin's Spartan luncheon had not indisposed her guest for cake and muffins, and basking in the glow of the fire Harrington forgot his troubles, enjoyed his tea, and maintained a very fair appearance of cheerfulness while his sisters questioned and his father put in an occasional word.

"I'm afraid you are getting rather too friendly at the Mount," said Matthew Dalbrook. "I don't like Sir Henry Baldwin, and I don't think he's an advantageous friend for you."

"Oh, but we're old chums," said Harrington, blushing a little; "we were at Oxford together, you know."

"I'm afraid we both know it, Harry, and to our cost," replied his father. "You might have succeeded in your divinity exam. if hadn't been for this fine gentleman friend of yours."

"I'm not sorry I failed, father. The law suits me ever so much better than the Church."

"So long as you stick to that opinion I'm satisfied. Only don't go to the Mount too often, and don't let the handsome Miss Baldwin make a fool of you."

If it had not been for the coloured shades over the lamps, which were so artistic as to be useless for seeing purposes, Harrington might have been seen to turn pale.

"No fear of that," Sophia exclaimed contemptuously. "Juliet Baldwin is not likely to give a provincial solicitor any encouragement. She's a girl who expects to marry for position, and though she is just a shade *passée*, she may make a good match even yet. She comes here because she likes *us*; but she's a thorough woman of the world, and you needn't be afraid of her running after Harry."

Harrington grew as red as a peony with suppressed indignation.

"Perhaps as the Baldwins are my friends you might be able to get on without talking any more about them," he said, scowling at his elder sister. "I've told you what we had for lunch, and how many servants were in the room, and what kind of gown Juliet—Miss Baldwin—was wearing. Don't you think we've had enough of them for to-night?"

"Quite enough, Harry, quite enough," said the father. "By-the by, did you read the *Times* leader on Gladstone's last manifesto? And where are the *Field* and the *Observer*? Bring me over a lamp that I can see by, Sophy, my dear. Those crimson lampshades of yours suggest one of Orchardson's pictures, but they don't help me to read my paper."

"They're the beastliest things I ever saw," said Harrington, vindictively.

"I'm sorry you don't like them," said Janet. "It was Juliet Baldwin who persuaded us to buy them. She had seen some at Medlow Court, and she raved about them."

Harrington went out of the room without another word. How odious his sisters had become of late; yet while he was at Oxford they had regarded him as an oracle, and he had found even sisterly appreciation pleasant.

It was some time since he had attended evening service, but on this particular evening he went alone, not troubling to invite his sisters, who were subject to an intermittent form of neuralgia which often prevented their going to church in the evening. To-night he avoided St. Peter's, in which his father had seats, and went to the more remote church of Fordington, where he had a pew all to himself on this frosty winter night, except for one well-behaved worshipper in the person of his father's old and confidential clerk, James Hayfield, a constant church-goer, who was punctual at every

evening service, whatever the weather. Harrington had expected to see him there.

Hayfield sat modestly aloof at the further end of the pew, but when the service was over the young man took some pains to follow close upon the heels of the grey-haired clerk, with shoulders bent by long years of desk-work, and respectable dark-blue Chesterfield overcoat with velvet collar.

"How do you do, Hayfield? Isn't this rather a sharp night for you to venture out in?" said Harrington, as they left the church porch.

"I'm a toughish customer, I thank you, Mr. Harrington. It would take severer weather than this to keep me away from the evening service. I'm very fond of the evening service. A fine sermon, sir, a fine, awakening sermon."

"Magnificent, capital," exclaimed Harrington, who hadn't heard two consecutive sentences, and whose mind had been engaged upon arithmetical problems of the most unpleasant kind. "It is uncommonly cold though," he added, shivering. "I'll walk round your way. It will be a little longer for me."

"You're very good, Mr. Harrington, very good indeed," said the old clerk, evidently touched by this unusual condescension. Never till to-night had his master's son offered to walk home from church with him.

The old man's gratitude was more than Harrington could stand. He could not take credit for kindly condescension, when he knew himself intent upon his own selfish ends.

"I'm afraid I'm not altogether disinterested in seeking your company to-night, Hayfield," he blurted out. "The fact is, I want to ask a favour of you."

"You may take it as granted, Mr. Harrington," answered the clerk, cheerily, "provided the granting of it lies within my power."

"Oh, it's not a tremendous affair—in point of fact, it's only a small money matter. I'm exceeding my allowance a little this quarter, but I intend to pull up next quarter; and it will be a great convenience to me in the meantime if you'll lend me ten or fifteen pounds."

It was out at last. He had no idea until he uttered the words how mean a creature the utterance of them would make him seem to himself. There are people who go through life borrowing, and who do it with the easiest grace, seeming to confer rather than to ask a favour. But perhaps even with these gifted ones the first plunge was painful.

"Fifteen or twenty, if you like, sir," replied Hayfield. "I've got a few pounds in an old stocking, and any little sum like that is freely at your service. I know your father's son won't break his word or

forget that an old servant's savings are his only bulwark against age and decay."

"My dear Hayfield, of course I shall repay you next quarter, without fail."

"Thank you, Mr. Harrington, I feel sure you will. And if at the same time I may venture a word, as an old man to a young one, in all friendliness and respect, I would ask you to beware of horses. I heard some one let drop the other evening in the billiard-room at the 'Antelope,' where I occasionally play a fifty, I heard it said, promiscuously, that Sir Henry Baldwin is a better hand at selling a horse than you are at buying one."

"That's bosh, Hayfield, and people in a God-forsaken town like Dorchester will always talk bosh—especially in a public billiard-room. The horse is a good horse, and I shall come home upon him when I send him up to Tattersall's after the hunting."

"I only hope he won't come home upon you, sir. You'd better not put a high reserve upon him if you don't want to see him again. I used to be considered a pretty good judge of a horse in my time. I never was an equestrian, but one sees more of a horse from the pavement than when one is on his back."

Harrington felt that he must bear with this twaddle for the sake of the twenty pounds which would enable him to lend Juliet a round fifty, and would thereby enable Juliet to go to Medlow Court and flirt with unknown men, and forget him upon whom her impecuniosity was inflicting such humiliation. After all, love is only another name for suffering.

Mr. Hayfield lived in West-Walk terrace, where he had a neat first floor in a stucco villa, semi-detached, and built at a period when villas strove to be architectural without attaining beauty. The first floor consisted of a front sitting-room, looking out upon the alley of sycamores and the green beyond, and a back bedroom, looking over gardens and houses, towards the church-tower in the heart of the town.

Provided with a latch-key, Mr. Hayfield admitted his master's son to the inner mysteries of the villa, where a lady with a very reedy voice was singing "Far away," in the front parlour, while a family conversation which almost drowned her melody was going on in the back parlour. Mr. Hayfield's bedroom candlestick and matches were ready for him on a Swiss bracket near his door, and his lamp was ready on a table in his sitting-room, where every object was disposed with a studied precision which marked at once the confirmed bachelor and the model lodger. "The Pilgrim's Progress," "The Christian Year," "Whitaker's Almanack," and "Uncle Tom's Cabin," were placed with mathematical regularity upon the walnut loo table, surrounding a centrepiece of wax flowers in an alabaster vase under a glass shade. A smaller table of the nature described

as Pembroke was placed nearer the fire, and on this appeared Mr. Hayfield's supper-tray, set forth with a plate of cold roast beef, a glass saucer of Oriental pickle, cheese, and accompaniments, flanked by an Imperial pint of Guinness'. A small fire burned brightly in the grate, whose dimensions had been reduced by a careful adjustment of fire-bricks.

"Sit down, my dear Mr. Harrington, you'll find that chair very comfortable. I'll go and get you the money. My cash-box is in the next room. Can I tempt you to join me in a plate of cold ribs? There's plenty more where that came from. Mrs. Potter has a fine wing rib every Sunday, from year's end to year's end. I generally take my dinner with her and her family, but I sup alone. A little society goes a long way with a man of my age. I like my *Lloyd* and my *News of the World* after supper."

He went into his bedroom, which was approached by folding doors, and came back again in two minutes with a couple of crisp notes, the savings of half a year, savings which meant a good deal of self-denial in a man who, in his own words, wished to live like a gentleman. The old clerk prided himself upon his good broadcloth, clean linen, and respectable lodgings; and it was felt in the town that so respectable a servant enhanced even the respectability of Dalbrook and Son.

Harrington took the bank-notes with many thanks, and insisted upon writing a note of hand—albeit the old clerk reminded him that Sunday was a *dies non*—at the desk where Hayfield wrote his letters and did any copying work he cared to do after office hours. He stayed while the old man ate his temperate meal, but would not be persuaded to share it. Indeed, his lips felt hot and dry, and it seemed to him as if he should never want to eat again; but he gladly accepted a tumbler of the refreshing Guinness' upon the repeated assurance that there was plenty more where that came from.

There was a rapid thaw on the following morning, so Harrington rode the black over to the Mount in the twilight after office hours, a liberty which that high-bred animal resented by taking fright at every doubtful object in the long leafless avenue beyond the Roman Amphitheatre.

Trifles which would have been light as air to him, jogging homeward in company after a long day's hunting, assumed awful and ghostly aspects under the combined influences of solitude and want of work. The twilight ride to the Mount was in fact a series of hairbreadth escapes, and it would have needed a stronger stimulant than the Dowager's wishy-washy tea to restore Mr. Dalbrook's physical balance, if his mental balance had not been so thoroughly unhinged as to make him half unconscious of physical discomfort.

"You look awfully seedy," said Juliet, as she poured out tea from a pot that had been standing nearly half an hour.

The Dowager had retired to her own den, where she occupied a great portion of her life in writing prosy letters to her relatives and connections of all degrees; but as she never sent them anything else, this was her only way of maintaining the glow of family feeling.

"The black nearly pulled my fingers off," replied Harrington. "I never knew him so fresh."

"You should have taken it out of him on the downs," answered Juliet, rather contemptuously. "The grass is all right after the thaw. Have you brought me what you so kindly promised?"

He took a sealed envelope out of his breast-pocket and handed it to her.

"Is this the fifty? How quite too good of you!" she cried, pocketing it hastily. "You don't know what a difficulty you have got me out of; but I'm afraid I may have inconvenienced you."

This was evidently an after-thought.

"'Being your slave, what should I do but tend upon the hours and times of your desire?'" quoted Harrington, with a sentimental air.

"How sweet!" exclaimed Juliet, really touched by his affection; yet she would rather he had told her that fifty pounds was a sum of no consequence, and that so small a loan involved no inconvenience for him.

"I'm afraid his father can hardly be as rich as people think," she said to herself, while Harrington relaxed his strained muscles before the fire.

"How I wish you were not going to Medlow!" he said presently.

"So do I; but I can't possibly get out of it, and then it's a blessed escape to get away from here."

"Do you really dislike your home?" asked her lover, wondering at this hitherto unknown characteristic in a young woman.

"I loathe it, and so does my sister, though she pretends to be domestic and religious and all that kind of thing. Lady Baldwin is an impossible person, and our housekeeping would disgrace the Union. If I had not had the *entrée* of plenty of good houses, and been in request, I should have been found hanging in one of the attics years ago."

This candour gave Harrington an uncomfortably chilly feeling, as if a damp cold wind had blown over him, and then he told himself that it would be his privilege to initiate this dear girl in the tranquil delights of a happy home, which, while modest in its pretensions, should yet be smart enough to satisfy her superior tastes and aspirations.

"When do you go?" he asked, preparing to take leave.

"To-morrow. Your kindness has made everything easy to me."

"Come back as soon as you can, love;" and then there was some lingering foolishness permissible between engaged lovers, and the beautiful Miss Baldwin's head reposed for two or three minutes upon the articled clerk's shoulder, while he looked into her eyes and told her that they were stars to light him on to fame and fortune.

"I hope they'll show you a short cut," she said.

He left her cheered by the thought that she was very fond of him; and so she was, but he was not the first, second, third, or fourth young man of whom she had been fond, nor was it a new thing to her to be told that her eyes were guiding stars.

CHAPTER XIX.

> "All the creatures
> Made for Heaven's honours, have their ends, and good ones,
> All but the cozening crocodiles, false women."

February had begun, the frost and snow had disappeared. There were soft breathings of spring in the breezes that blew over the broad grassy downs beyond the Roman encampment, and the sportsmen of the neighbourhood were rejoicing in open weather and lengthening daylight; but Juliet Baldwin was still at Medlow Court, and the heart of Harrington Dalbrook was heavy as he set out in the pleasant morning for some distant meet; and it was heavier as he rode home in the evening, after a day's sport which had shown him only too distinctly that the black horse was not so young as he had been. He hugged himself with the delusion that those indications of advancing years which were but too obvious towards the close of a trying day across a heavy country, would vanish after a week's rest, and that the horse would show no signs of staleness at Tattersall's, where he must inevitably be sold before the end of the month, his owner seeing no other way of meeting the bill that had been given in exchange for a beast whose name should have been, not Mahmud, but White Elephant.

Harrington's sole motive for buying a hunter—or, rather, his sole excuse for being trapped into the purchase—was the expectation of being able to ride to hounds in Miss Baldwin's company. She had

said to him "You ought to hunt," and he had straightway hunted, just as, if she had told him to balloon, he would have ballooned. And now Juliet Baldwin was following the hounds in another county while he was in Dorsetshire plodding along dreary roads to inaccessible meets at places which would seem to have been chosen with a special study of everybody's inconvenience. The whole business was fraught with bitterness. He had never loved hunting for its own sake—had never possessed the single-mindedness of the genuine sportsman, who cares not for weather or country, or companionship, or hunger or thirst, so long as there is a fox at the beginning of the day and blood at the end.

Juliet was out with the hounds three days a week. She wrote rapturous accounts of forty minutes here, and an hour there; and every run which she described was apparently the quickest thing that had ever been known in that country. She let her lover know *en passant* that she had been greatly admired, and that her horsemanship had been talked about. Her letters were very affectionate, but they testified also to a self-love that amounted to adoration. Her frocks, her horses—provided, as the young ravens are fed, by a kindly Providence in the shape of casual acquaintance—her breaks at billiards, her waltzing, were all dilated upon with a charming frankness.

"It seems rather foolish to write all this egotistical twaddle," she apologized, "but you complain if I send you a short letter, and there is literally nothing to tell here—at least nothing about any one you know, or that would have the faintest interest for you—so I am obliged to scribble about my frocks and my little social triumphs."

This was kindly meant, no doubt, but it stung him to be reminded that his friends were not her friends, that Belgravia is not further from Islington than her people were from his people.

In one of her letters she wrote casually:—

"Why don't you put Mahmud into a horse-box and come over for a day with these hounds. It would be capital fun. There is a dear little rustic inn where you and your horse can put up—and Lady B. would ask you to dinner as a matter of course. I dare say your highly respectable hair will stand on end at some of our ways—but that won't matter. I am sure you would enjoy an evening or two at Medlow. Think about it, like a dear boy."

Harrington did think about it—indeed, from the first reading of his lady-love's unceremonious invitation he thought of nothing else. After much puzzling over time-tables, he found that trains—those particular trains which condescend, with an asterisk, to carry horses—could be matched so as to convey the black horse to the immediate vicinity of Medlow Court in something under a day, and this being so, he telegraphed his intention of putting up at the "Medlow Arms"

on the following night, taking pains to add "Shall arrive at five p.m.," so as to secure the promised invitation to dinner. He had been so chary of spending money since his loan to Juliet that he had still a few pounds in hand, enough as he thought to pay travelling expenses and hotel bills. His heart was almost light as he packed his hunting-gear and dress suit, albeit March 10 was written in fiery characters across a spectral bill which haunted him wherever he went.

It was still early in February, he told himself. Some stroke of luck might happen to him. Some rich young fool at Medlow Court might take a fancy to Mahmud and want to buy him. He had heard of men who wanted to buy horses, although it had been his fate to meet only the men who were eager to sell.

After no less than three changes of trains he arrived at the Toppleton Road Station—for Medlow and Toppleton—about half-past four, weary, but full of hope. He was to see her again—after three weeks' severance. He was going at her own express desire. It was her tact and cleverness that had made the visit easy for him. Had he not Lady Burdenshaw's invitation in his pocket, in a fine open-hearted hand, sprawling over three sides of large note-paper:—

"Dear Mr. Dalbrook,

"I hear you are coming over for a day or two with our hounds, and I hope you will contrive to dine with us every evening while you are in the neighbourhood. Your father and Sir Phillimore were old friends. Dinner at eight.

"Sincerely yours,

"Sarah Burdenshaw."

Sir Phillimore had been in the family vault nearly fifteen years. The malicious averred that he had sought that dismal shelter as a refuge and a relief from the life which Lady Burdenshaw imposed upon him—open house, big shoots, hunting breakfasts, fancy balls, and private theatricals in the country; and in London perpetual parties or perpetual gadding about.

Sir Phillimore's grandfather had come up from Aberdeen, a raw boy without a penny, and had found out something about the manufacture of iron which had eventually made him a millionaire. Sir Phillimore's fortune had reconciled the beautiful Sally Tempest to a marriage with a man who was her senior by a quarter of a century, and the only license she had allowed herself had been her indulgence in boundless extravagance, and a laxity of manner which had somewhat shocked society in the sober fifties and sixties, though it left her moral character unimpeached.

In the eighties nobody wondered or exclaimed at Lady Burden-

shaw's freedom of speech and manner, or at the manners she encouraged in her guests. In the eighties Sarah Burdenshaw was generally described as "good fun."

Harrington found the dear little rustic inn very picturesque externally, but small and stuffy within, and the bedroom into which he was ushered was chiefly occupied by a large old-fashioned, four-post bedstead, with chintz hangings that smelt of mildewed lavender —indeed, the pervading odour of the "Medlow Arms" was mildew. He dressed as well as he could under considerable disadvantages; and a rumbling old landau, which had the local odour, conveyed him to Medlow Court much quicker than he could have supposed possible from his casual survey of the horse. It was ten minutes to eight when he entered Lady Burdenshaw's drawing-room.

It was a very large room, prettily furnished in a careless style, as if by a person whose heart was not set upon furniture. There were plenty of low luxurious chairs, covered with a rather gaudy chintz, and befrilled with lace and muslin, and there were flowers in abundance; but of human life the room was empty.

Harrington hardly knew whether he was relieved or discomposed at finding himself alone. He had leisure in which to pace the room two or three times, to arrange his tie and inspect his dress suit before one of the long glasses, and then to feel offended at Juliet's coldness. She knew that he was to be there. She might surely have contrived to be in the drawing-room ten minutes before the dinner hour.

Half a dozen people straggled in, a not too tidy-looking matron in ruby velvet, a sharp-featured girl in black lace, and some men who looked sporting or military. One of these talked to him.

"I think you must be Mr. Dalbrook," he said, after they had discussed the weather and the state of the roads.

"You are quite right—but how did you guess?"

"Miss Baldwin told me you were coming, and I don't think there's any one else expected to-night. Do you know your hostess?"

"I am waiting for that privilege."

"Ah! that explains your punctuality. Nobody is ever punctual at Medlow. Eight o'clock means half-past, and sometimes a quarter to nine. Lady Burdenshaw has reached her sixtieth year without having arrived at a comprehension of the nature of time, as an inelastic thing which will not stretch to suit feminine convenience. She still believes in the elasticity of an hour, and rushes off to her room to dress when she ought to be sitting down to dinner. Her girl friends follow her example, and seldom leave the billiard-room or the tea-room till dear Lady B. leads the way."

A whole bevy of ladies entered the room rather noisily at this moment, and among them appeared Juliet, magnificent in a red gown, which set off the milky whiteness of her shoulders.

"Rather a daring combination with red hair," remarked the young lady in black, who was sitting on a narrow *causeuse* with a large man, whose white moustache and padded chest suggested a cavalry regiment.

"You may call the lady a harmony in red," said the gentleman.

Harrington scowled upon these prattlers, and then crossed the room to greet his love. Yes, it was a daring combination, the scarlet gown with the ruddy tints in her auburn hair; but the audacity was justified by success. She looked a magnificent creature, dazzling as Vashti in her Eastern splendour, invincible as Delilah. Who could resist her?

She gave her hand to Harrington, and seemed pleased to see him, but in the next moment he saw her looking beyond him towards the end of the room. He turned, involuntarily following the direction of her eyes, and saw the man who had talked to him, and who was now evidently watching them. He was a middle-aged man, handsome, tall, and upstanding, and with an air which Harrington considered decidedly patrician.

"Who is that man by the piano?" he asked.

"Major Swanwick, Lord Beaulieu's younger brother."

"Ah, I thought he was a swell," said Harrington, innocently. "He was very civil to me just now. You might have been in the drawing-room a little earlier, Juliet. You must have known that I was longing to see you."

"My dear boy, we were playing skittle-pool till five minutes to eight. I had no idea you were in the house. Ah, here comes Lady B."

A fat, fair, flaxen-haired lady in a sky-blue tea-gown embroidered with silver palm-leaves came rolling into the room, murmuring apologies for having kept people waiting for their dinner.

"I know you must all be delightfully ravenous," she said; "and that's ever so much better than feeling that dinner has come too soon after lunch."

Juliet introduced her friend, who was most graciously received.

"How is your father?" asked Lady Burdenshaw. "It is ages since I saw him—more than twenty years, I believe. Sir Phillimore bought some land in your county, and Mr. Dalbrook acted for him in the matter, and he still receives the rents. And so you are going out with the hounds to-morrow? They meet quite near—not more than seven or eight miles from your inn. Juliet will show you the way across country. She's always in the first flight; but if you want to know her particular talent, you should see her play pool. I can assure you she makes all the men sit up."

Harrington scarcely followed the lady's meaning. There was no time for explanations, as the butler, who had been waiting for her Ladyship's appearance, now announced dinner, and Harrington had

the bliss of going to the dining-room with Juliet Baldwin on his arm. He felt as if he were in the Moslem's enchanted fields as he sat by her side at the brilliant table, with its almost overpowering perfume of hot-house flowers, which were grouped in great masses of bloom among the old silver and the many-coloured Venetian glass. Yes, it was a Mohammedan paradise, and this was the houri, this lovely creature with the milky shoulders rising out of soft folds of scarlet crape.

"How long are you going to stay here, Juliet?" he asked, as the houri unfolded her napkin.

She gave a little laugh before she answered the question.

"Compare this room and table with our dining-room at the Mount—you can compare the dinner with my mother's dinners after you have eaten it—and ask yourself if any reasonable creature would be in a hurry to leave this Canaan for that wilderness. I'm afraid I shall stop as long as ever dear old Lady B. asks me; and she is always pressing me to extend my visit."

"I don't think dinner can be much of attraction in your mind, Juliet," said Harrington.

"Of course not—girls don't care what they eat," replied Juliet, sipping her clear soup, and most fully appreciating the flavour. "But there are so many advantages at Medlow. There is the hunting, for instance, which is much better than any I can get at home, where I have positively no horse that I can call my own. Here I can always rely upon a good mount."

"Has Lady Burdenshaw a large stable?"

"Oh, she keeps a good many horses; but most of hers are only fit for leather. There are men who come here with strings of hunters, and have always a young one that they like me to handle for them."

"Juliet, you will get your neck broken," cried Harrington, pale with horror, and staring vacantly at the fish that was being offered to him.

"There is no fear of that while I ride young horses, the danger is an old one. My father taught me to ride, and as he was one of the best cross-country riders in Dorset I am not likely to make a mistake. You had better try that *sole Normande;* it is one of the Medlow specialities."

"Juliet, I hate the idea of your staying in this house—or in any house where there is a crowd of fast men. I hate the idea of your riding men's horses—of your being under an obligation to a stranger——"

"Don't I tell you that the obligation is all the other way. A young hunter is a more saleable article when he has carried a lady. 'Will suit a bold horsewoman in a stiff country.' That sort of thing

is worth a great deal in a catalogue, and the men whose horses I ride are not strangers."

"At the most they are casual acquaintances."

"Call them that if you like. Why should not one profit by one's acquaintances?"

"There is one of your benefactors looking at you at this moment, and looking as if he objected to my talking to you."

"How dare you talk about my benefactors? Do you suppose I had you invited to Medlow in order that you might insult me?"

This little dialogue was conducted in subdued tones, but with a good deal of acrimony upon either side. Harrington was bursting with jealousy.

The house, the men, the very atmosphere awakened distrust. He detested those men for their square shoulders and soldierly bearing, for the suggestion of cavalry or household brigade which seemed to him to pervade the masculine portion of the assembly. He had always hated military men. Their chief mission in life seemed to be to make civilians look insignificant.

Miss Baldwin ate the next *entrée* in stony silence, and it was not till he had abjectly apologized for his offensive speech that her lover was again taken into favour. She relented at last, however, and favoured him with a good deal of information about the house party which made such a brilliant show at Lady Burdenshaw's luxurious board.

The men were for the most part military—the greater number bachelors, or at any rate unencumbered with wives. Two had been divorced, one was a widower, another was separated in the friendliest way from a wife who found she could live in better style unfettered by matrimonial supervision.

Major Swanwick was one of the two who had profited by Sir James Hannen's jurisdiction.

"His wife was Lady Flora Thurles, one of the Tantallans. All the Tantallan girls went wrong, don't you know. It was in the blood."

"You and he seem to be great friends," said Harrington, still suspicious.

"Oh, we have met very often; he is quite an old chum of mine He is a good old thing."

Seeing that the good old thing looked as if he were well under forty, Harrington was not altogether reassured, even by this comfortable tone. He watched his betrothed and the Major all through the long evening in the billiard-room, where pool was again the chief amusement of a very noisy party, of which Juliet and Major Swanwick seemed to him the ringleaders and master-spirits. It was with difficulty that he, the affianced, got speech with his betrothed.

There were just a few minutes, while the old family tankards were being carried round with mulled claret and other cunning drinks, in which Juliet vouchsafed to give her attention to her lover, he having in a manner cornered her into a draped recess at the end of the room, where he held her prisoner while he bade her good night.

"I shall see you at the meet to-morrow," he said.

"I won't promise to be at the meet, but I shall find you and the hounds in plenty of time. I know every inch of this country."

"Whose horse are you going to ride to-morrow?"

"A fine upstanding chestnut; I'm sure you'll admire him?"

"Yes, yes, but whose?"

"Whose?" echoed Juliet, as if she scarcely understood the word. "Oh,"—with a sudden flash of intelligence,—"you mean whose property is he? As if that mattered! He belongs to Major Swanwick."

"Good night!" said Harrington; and he went off to take leave of Lady Burdenshaw, who was sitting in the capacious ingle nook, with a circle of men about her telling her anecdotes in Parisian French, and from whom every now and then there burst peals of jovial laughter.

"At my age one understands everything, and one may hear everything," said her Ladyship.

Harrington went back to the "Medlow Arms" more depressed than he had felt during any period of his courtship. Instinct had warned him of the dangers that must lurk in such a house as Medlow Court for such a girl as Juliet Baldwin; but neither instinct nor imagination had prepared him for the horrible reality. To see the woman who was to be his wife smoking cigarettes, playing shilling pool, and bandying doubtful jokes with men who had obviously the very poorest opinion of the opposite sex, was an agony which he had never thought to suffer; and for the first time since his engagement he asked himself whether it would not have been better to have trusted his future happiness to the most insipid and colourless of the girls with whom he played tennis than to this magnificent specimen of emancipated smartness. The image of Juliet sprawling over the billiard-table, with her eyes on fire and her shoulders half out of her gown as she took a difficult "life," pursued him like a bacchanalian nightmare all through his troubled snatches of sleep. The stony straw mattrass and lumpy feather bed would not have been conducive to slumber under the happiest circumstances, but for a mind disturbed by care they were a bed of torture. He rose at seven, unrefreshed, heavy-hearted, detesting chanticleer, cloudy skies, and all the old-fashioned fuss about a hunting morning, and wishing himself in his comfortable room in the good old house in Cornhill, where he had ample space and all things needful to a

luxurious toilet. He got himself dressed somehow. He was in the saddle at nine o'clock, after a breakfast for which he had no appetite.

It was a long, dreary ride to the little roadside inn at which the hounds met, and Harrington being particularly punctual, had to jog along companionless till the last mile, when Major Swanwick and another man from Medlow overtook him and regaled him with their talk for the rest of the way.

"I think I know that black horse," said the Major, who looked provokingly well in his red coat, chimney pot, and cream-coloured tops, thereby making Harrington ashamed of his neat dark grey coat, Bedford cords, and bowler hat. "Wasn't he in Baldwin's stud nine years ago?"

"I bought him of Sir Henry Baldwin."

"Thought so. Good hand at selling a horse, Baldwin! However, I suppose there's some work in the black horse yet."

"I hope so, for I mean to hunt him to the end of the season," answered Harrington, ignoring that awful necessity of selling before the end of the month.

Hope glowed faintly in his breast as he saw the Major's keen eye going over his mount, as if studying the condition of every limb and every muscle.

"Wears well," he said, after this deliberate survey, "but I'm afraid you'll find him like the wonderful one-horse shay. He'll go to pieces all at once. Did Baldwin tell you his age?"

"He said something about rising eight—but I didn't inquire very particularly, as I know the horse is a good one."

"And it was a good one of Baldwin to talk about rising eight. He would have been within the mark if he had said rising eighteen. I've bought a horse of Sir Henry myself, and,"—after a brief pause —"I've sold him one."

"And I dare say that made you even," said Harrington, with acidity. He would have liked to call the Major out for his insolence, and almost regretted that he was a Briton, and not a Frenchman and a professed duellist.

"Faith, I don't think he had altogether the best of me—for when he rode that hunter of mine he was like the little old woman in the nursery rhyme, of whom it was said that she should have music wherever she went. He had music, and to spare."

And so with jovial laughter they rode up to the open space in front of the "Red Cow," where the hounds were grouped about a duck-pond, while the master chatted with his friends.

It was an hour later before Juliet appeared, cropping up suddenly on a windy common, with three other girls and two men, while the hounds were drawing the furze.

"You see I could make a pretty good guess where to find you,"

she said to Harrington. "How well the black looks! You have been saving him up, I suppose?"

"No, I've hunted as often as I could. I had no other distraction during your absence."

"How sweet of you to say that—with all the gaieties of Dorchester to allure you! Hark! they've found, and we shall be off in a minute. Yes, there he goes!"—pointing with her whip to the spot where the fox had flashed across the short level sward, vanishing next moment in the withered heather. "Now you'll see what this horse can do, and you can tell me what you think of him when we meet at dinner."

There was the usual minute or so of flutter and expectation, and then the business-like calm—an almost awful calm—every man settling down to his work, intent upon himself, steering carefully for a good place.

Harrington was a nervous rider, and if fortune helped him to get a good place he rarely kept it. To-day he was more than usually nervous, fancying that Juliet's eye was upon him, which it wasn't, and, indeed, could not have been, unless it had been situated in the back of her head, since she was already ever so far in front.

In time, however, he, too, contrived to settle down, and the black horse took the business into his own hands, and kept his rider fairly close to the hounds. For the first twenty minutes there was a good deal of jumping, but of a mildish order, and Harrington felt that he was distinguishing himself, inasmuch as he was able to stick to his horse, though not always to his saddle.

They lost their first fox, after a very fair run, and they waited about for nearly two hours before they started a second, which they did eventually in a scrubby copse on the skirts of a great stretch of ploughed land

The plough took a great deal out of Mahmud, and after the plough came a series of small fields, with some stiffish fences, which had to be taken by any man who wanted to keep with the hounds. Here Juliet was in her glory, for the chestnut on which she was mounted was a fine fencer, and she knew how to handle him, or, perhaps it may be said, how to let him alone.

Mahmud had been almost as fine a fencer as the fiery young chestnut, and he was a horse of a great heart, always ready to attempt more than he could do. The livery stable people had told Harrington that if his legs were only as good as his heart he would be one of the best hunters in the county. And now, with some quavering of spirit on his own part, Harrington trusted that heart would stand instead of legs, and get him and the black over the fences somehow. Just at this crucial point in the run, Juliet was in front of him, and Major Swanwick was pressing

him behind. He was near the hounds, and altogether in a place of honour, could he but keep it, and to keep it he felt was worth a struggle.

He got over or through the first fence somehow; not gloriously, but without too much loss of time; and galloped gaily towards the second, which looked a stiffer and more complicated affair. Juliet's horse went over like a bird, and Juliet sat him like a butterfly, no more discomposed by the shock than if she had been some winged insect that had lighted on his haunches. Mahmud followed close, excited by the horse in front of him, and rose to his work gallantly; but this time it was timber and not quick-set that had to be cleared, and that stiff rail was just too much for the old hunter's legs. He blundered, hit himself with the sharp edge of the rail, and fell heavily forward, sending his rider flying into the next field, and sinking in a struggling mass into the ditch. Major Swanwick dismounted in an instant, scrambled over the hedge, and ran to help Harrington up.

"Are you hurt?"

"Not much," answered the fallen man, staggering to his feet, hatless, and with a dazed look. "I'm afraid my horse is done for, though, poor old chap."

In that moment his only thought was of the beast he had been fond of, which had been to him as a friend, albeit often an unmanageable one. He had no thought just then of the money value of that doubled-up mass lying in the ditch.

Mahmud had finished his course. His forearm was broken, and the most merciful thing was to make a swift end of him with a bullet from a gun which one of the whips fetched from the nearest farmhouse. His owner stood by him and waited for the end, while Juliet and the rest of the hunt galloped away out of sight. When the shot had been fired the black horse was left to be carted off to the kennels, and Harrington turned to walk slowly and sorrowfully to the farmhouse, where he was promised a trap to convey him to the "Medlow Arms."

Then and then only did he discover that he had dislocated his shoulder, and was suffering acute agony, and then and then only did he remember the acceptance which he had given for the black horse.

Where now were the fifty pounds which he had reckoned upon getting for the animal at Tattersall's, trusting to Providence, or old Hayfield, to make up the balance of thirty. He saw himself now with that horrible acceptance falling due and no assets.

He got back to the rustic inn, with great suffering, and laid himself down upon the stony-hearted four-poster instead of dressing to go and dine at Medlow. The village surgeon came and attended to his shoulder, a painful business, though not unskilfully done; and

then he was told he must keep himself as quiet as possible for a few days, and must not think of travelling till the inflammation was reduced. It was his right shoulder on which he had fallen, and he was utterly helpless. The handy young man of the "Medlow Arms" had to valet him and assist him to eat the tough mutton chop which was served to him in lieu of all the delicacies of Medlow Court.

A messenger came from that hospitable mansion at ten o'clock with a little note from Juliet.

"Why did you not turn up at dinner-time? Major Swanwick said you were all right. I waited till I saw you get up, safe and sound. So sorry for poor old Mahmud. Come to breakfast to-morrow and tell us all about it. We killed in a quarter of an hour.—Yours, JULIET."

Harrington sent his best regards to Miss Baldwin and his apologies to Lady Burdenshaw, and begged to inform them that he had dislocated his shoulder, and was unable to write.

He had a miserable night—sleepless and in pain—haunted by the ghost of Mahmud, whose miserable end afflicted him sorely, and troubled by the perplexities of his financial position. Should he tell his father the whole truth? Alas, it seemed only yesterday that he had told his father the whole truth about his college debts; and though truthfulness is a great virtue, a second burst of candour coming on the heels of the first might be too much for Mr. Dalbrook's patience.

Should he borrow the money from Juanita? No, too humiliating. He had always felt a restraining pride in all his intercourse with his grand relations at Cheriton Chase. They were of his own blood; but they were above him in social status, and he was sensitively alive to the difference in position.

Could he apply to his brother? Again the answer was in the negative. He doubted whether Theodore possessed eighty guineas in the world.

And so he went on revolving the same considerations through his fevered brain all through the long winter night. There were moments of exasperation and semi-delirium, when he thought he would go over to Medlow Court as soon as he was able to move, and appeal to the beneficence of Lady Burdenshaw for the temporary accommodation of a cheque for eighty guineas.

And thus the night wore on till the morning sounds of the inn brought the sense of stern reality across his feverish dreams; and then, amidst the crowing of cocks, and the bumping of pails, and tramping of horses in the stable yard, he contrived to fall asleep, after having failed in that endeavour all through the quiet of the night.

It was about half-past eleven, and the handy-man had helped him

to make a decent toilet and to establish himself upon a sofa that was a little harder than the bed, when a pony-carriage drove up to the door, and the chamber-maid came in with an awe-stricken face to announce Lady Burdenshaw and another lady, and would he please to see them, as they wanted to come upstairs.

The room was tidy, and he was dressed as well as a helpless man could be, so he said yes, they might come up, which was almost unnecessary, as they were already on the stairs, and were in the room a minute afterwards.

Juliet expressed herself deeply concerned at her lover's misfortune, though she did not attempt to conceal from him that she considered his riding in fault. Lady Burdenshaw was more sympathetic, and was horrified at the discomfort of his surroundings.

"You cannot possibly endure that cruel-looking sofa till your shoulder is well," she said, "and such a small room, too, poor fellow; and a horrid low ceiling; and the house smells damp. I wonder if we could venture to move him to the Court, Ju?"

Ju was of opinion that such a proceeding would be to the last degree dangerous.

"The only chance for his shoulder is to keep quiet," she said.

Unfortunately, the surgeon had said the same thing, and there could be no doubt about it.

"Perhaps you could send him a sofa?" suggested Juliet.

"Of course I could; and I can send him soups and jellies and things—but that isn't like having him at Medlow, where he could have a large airy room, and where you and I could take it in turns to amuse him."

"Dear Lady Burdenshaw, you are too good to an almost stranger," murmured Harrington, moved to the verge of tears by her geniality.

"Stranger! fiddlesticks. Don't I know your cousin, Lord Cheriton; and has not your father done business for me? Besides, I like young men, when they're modest and pleasant, as you are. Indeed I sometimes like them when they're impertinent. I like young faces and young voices about me. I like to be amused, and to see people happy. I can't endure the idea of your lying for ever so many days and nights in this dog-kennel, when you came to Medlow to enjoy yourself."

"It mustn't be many days and nights. I must get home somehow by the end of the week, if I post all the way."

"Oh, you needn't post. When you are able to be moved, my carriage shall take you to the station; and I'll get the railroad people to take an invalid carriage through to Dorchester for you."

"Indeed, you must not be impatient, Harry," said Juliet. "I shall come to see you every day, except on the hunting days,

and even then I can walk over in the evening, if Lady B. will let me."

"Of course I shall let you. All my sympathies are with lovers, and when you are married I shall give Mr. Dalbrook as much of my business as I possibly can venture to take away from those dear old fossils at Salisbury, who have been the family lawyers for the best part of a century."

Juliet had confided her engagement to Lady B. at the beginning of her visit, and she and Lady B. had talked over the young man's chances of doing well in the world, and the wisdom or the foolishness of such an alliance. Lady B. had seen a good deal of smart young men and women, and she had discovered that the smart young men were very keen in the furtherance of their own interests, and that the smart young women had considerable difficulty in getting themselves permanently established in the smart world by smart marriages. Some were beautiful, and many were admired; but they had to wait for eligible suitors, and one false step in the early stages of their career would sometimes blight their chances of success. Juliet had taken many false steps, and had got herself a good deal talked about, and Lady Burdenshaw felt that her chance of making an advantageous match had been lessening year by year until it had come to be almost nil.

"If this young fellow is sensible and good-looking, and has a little money, I really think, Ju, you ought to marry him," concluded Lady B., talking the matter over with her *protégée* before she had seen Harrington.

She fancied that Juliet had cooled somewhat in her feelings towards her youthful lover within the last week or ten days. It might be, Lady B. thought, that she began to perceive that he was too young, that the difference in their ages, which was not much, and the difference in their worldly experience, which was enormous, unfitted them to be happy together.

"No doubt the young man is a *pis aller*," reflected Lady Burdenshaw, after Harrington's appearance at Medlow, "but he is a very good-looking fellow, and by no means bad—as a *pis aller*. Of course, he is too young for Juliet, and much too fresh and innocent to understand her; but if he knew more he wouldn't be so eager to marry her—so she ought to be satisfied."

Lady Burdenshaw sent a delightful sofa, and a lot of books, flowers, pillows, foot-rests, and other luxuries in one of her own waggons, within an hour of her return to Medlow, and Harrington's comfort was considerably increased by her kindness. Still the thought of that wretched acceptance was like a thorn in every cushion, a scorpion under every pillow, a wasp in every flower. Nor was he altogether at ease about Juliet. He thought that he had

detected a constraint in her manner, a shiftiness in her eyes. It had wounded him that she had so promptly opposed his being conveyed to Medlow. It might be that she was influenced only by concern for his safety; yet it would have been natural for his betrothed to wish to have him under the same roof with her, where she might tend and comfort him in his helplessness. Pain and anguish were wringing his brow, and she who should have been his ministering angel was content to limit her ministrations to half an hour of somewhat disjointed conversation, and to the polite attention of bringing him the morning papers, when everybody at Medlow had looked at them.

Lady Burdenshaw had very kindly taken upon herself to write to Matthew Dalbrook, explaining his son's prolonged absence, and making light of his accident as a matter only involving a few days' rest.

The few days had gone on till the fourth day after his fall, and in spite of all that Lady Burdenshaw had done to ameliorate his captivity the hours of the day and the night seemed to grow longer and longer, till he began to think of Silvio Pellico and the Man in the Iron Mask. Juliet's visits were very short, and she was obviously absent-minded and bored even during that scanty half-hour which she gave to her betrothed.

"I'm afraid you are like Colonel Enderby's wife," he said, "and that the sight of sickness or suffering is more than you can bear."

"Who was Colonel Enderby's wife?"

"Don't you know? She is the heroine of a very clever novel—an original, strange, and, I fear, not unnatural character."

"Don't remember her," answered Juliet, carelessly. "I don't read many English novels. They are too slow for me."

On the hunting day he missed even that brief visit, and was expectant of her coming all the evening, as she had promised to make up for the day's absence. But the night was wet, and she told him next day that she did not like to take out Lady Burdenshaw's horse and man in such weather.

"The stable people would have resented it, and I am obliged to stand well with the stable," she said.

He thought she had a troubled look that day. It seemed to him that it cost her an effort to keep her attention upon any subject, and she lapsed into silence every now and then, looking dreamily out of the window to the thatched roofs and ploughed fields in the distance.

"I'm afraid you have something on your mind," he said.

"What nonsense! What put such an idea into your head?"

"You are so thoughtful, and so much more silent than usual."

"There is so little to talk about in a sick room. If I were to tell you about our doings at Medlow I should only bore you."

"Not at all. I should be very pleased to hear how you amuse yourself. Is Major Swanwick still there?"

"Yes; he is still there."

He saw that her cheeks crimsoned as she answered his question, and he wondered whether she really had any *penchant* for the Major, or whether she suspected his jealous apprehensions upon that subject. She got up to go before he could question her further.

"I shall be late for luncheon," she said, "and Lady B. hates any of us to be absent!"

"I thought there was no such thing as punctuality at Medlow."

"Oh, we are pretty punctual at luncheon. It's the hungry hour, and we are all ravenous. Good-bye."

"*Au revoir.* You will come to-morrow, love; and come earlier, I hope."

"*Pas possible.* I shall be out with the hounds."

"Another blank day for me. But don't disappoint me in the evening, whatever the weather may be."

She was gone, leaving him doubtful of her fidelity, though far from suspecting the extent of her falsehood.

He endured the long, dull day as best he might, and improved his mind by skimming all the books which Lady Burdenshaw had sent him, which were really the cream of Mudie's last supply—travels, memoirs, gossip, magazines—books chosen with a view to the masculine mind, which was supposed to be indifferent to fiction. Evening came at last. His lamp was lighted, his fire swept and garnished. The hunting party would be jogging homeward in the wintry darkness, he thought. There were three hours to wait before half-past nine, which was the earliest time at which he could expect his beloved.

It was a little after the half-hour, when his heart began to beat faster at the sound of carriage wheels. This time she was not going to disappoint him. He listened for her step upon the stair—the firm, quick tread he knew so well; but it was another step which he heard, a slower and heavier tread, with much rustling of silken draperies. It must be Lady Burdenshaw come to chaperon her.

It was Lady Burdenshaw, but alone. She came in and drew near his sofa with a serious countenance.

"Great God!" he cried, starting up from his reclining position; "is anything the matter? An accident in the hunting field! Is she hurt?"

"No, my poor fellow. *She's* not hurt. It would take a great deal to hurt her. She's too hard. But she has done her best to hurt you."

"What do you mean?"

"She has gone off with that audacious scamp."

"Major Swanwick?"

"Yes. Did you suspect anything?"

"I thought there was an understanding between them."

"They went off together early this morning; walked five miles to the station, leaving their luggage to be looked after by the Major's servant, who had received his instructions and who got everything packed and off by the one o'clock train for London. I got this telegram late in the afternoon from Salisbury."

She handed him a telegram, which he read slowly, word by word, and then he slowly folded it and restored it to his visitor, in heart-stricken silence.

The telegram was in these words:—

"To Lady Burdenshaw, Medlow Court,—

"Major Swanwick and I were married at two o'clock, before the Registrar. We start for Monte Carlo to-night. Please break it to Harrington, and forgive me for going away without telling you. We thought it better to avoid fuss.

"Yours lovingly,

"Juliet Swanwick."

"God help this infatuated girl," said Lady Burdenshaw. "She has married a scoundrel who is up to his eyebrows in debt. He behaved brutally to his first wife, and he is not very likely to treat this one any better. I'm very sorry I ever had them in my house together. He was an old flame, and he had lost her more than one good match by his equivocal attentions. As for you, my dear young fellow, I congratulate you upon a very lucky escape."

Harrington put his hand before his eyes to hide the tears of mortification and wounded love. Yet, even while the sense of disappointment was keenest, he had a feeling that Lady Burdenshaw was right, and that he had escaped a lifelong martyrdom. How could he, with his limited means, have ever satisfied a woman who lived only for pleasure and excitement, dress and dissipation? Juliet had been very frank with him during their brief courtship, and he had seen enough of her character to know that this splendid creature was not of the stuff that makes a good wife for a professional man with his struggles all before him. He was sorry, he was angry, he was wounded to the quick; but in the midst of it all he felt that there was a burden lifted off his mind and off his life—that he could breathe more freely, that he was no longer overweighted in the race.

Lady Burdenshaw stopped with him for an hour, and told him a good many small facts to his charmer's discredit, although he begged her more than once to desist. It was her only idea of comforting him, and it may be that her efforts were not misdirected.

He was surprised on the following afternoon by a visit from his father, who was not satisfied with Lady Burdenshaw's report of his condition. Touched by this evidence of paternal affection, the young man took heart of grace and made a full confession—first of his engagement, and next of his pecuniary obligations—the acceptance so soon to fall due, the twenty pounds borrowed from Hayfield.

"I can pay that very easily out of my allowance," he said; "I only tell you about it to show what a mean hound I was becoming."

"You were very hard driven, my poor boy. You had been unlucky enough to fall in love with an unprincipled woman. You may thank Providence for having escaped a life of misery. Such an alliance as that would have wrecked your future. I would rather you married a housemaid with a good character than such a woman as Juliet Baldwin. However, there are plenty of nice girls in your own sphere, thank God, and plenty of pretty girls with unblemished character and antecedents."

Harrington went back to Dorchester with his father next day, and the acceptance was promptly honoured when it was presented at the house in Cornhill.

Sir Henry had discounted it at the local bank almost immediately after it passed into his possession, and the bank had regarded the document as good value for their money, Matthew Dalbrook being very unlikely to allow his son's signature to be dishonoured.

CHAPTER XX.

"All the spring-time of his love
Is already gone and past."

THEODORE went back to wintry London before the year was a week old. He settled himself by his lonely fireside, in the silence of his old-fashioned rooms. All he had of the beauty of this world was a glimpse of the river athwart the heavy grey mists of a London morning, or the lamps on the Embankment shining like a string of jewels in the evening dusk. There were days of sullen, hopeless fog, when even these things were hidden from him, and when it was hard work to keep that stealthy, penetrating greyness and damp cold out of his rooms.

He had brought a fox-terrier from Dorchester on his return from his holiday, an old favourite that had seen the best days of her youth, and was better able to put up with a sedentary life, varied only by an occasional run, than a younger animal would have been. This faithful friend, an animated little beast even at this mature stage of her existence, lightened the burden of his loneliness, were it only by leaping on to his knees twenty times in five minutes, and only desisting therefrom upon most serious remonstrance. It was pleasant to him to have something that loved him, even this irrepressible Miss Nipper, with her sidelong grin of affectionate greeting, and her unconquerable suspicion of rats behind the wainscot. He felt less like Dr. Faustus on that famous Easter morning, when the emptiness of life and learning came home to the lonely student with such desolating intensity, when even a devil was welcome who could offer escape from that dull burden of existence.

He had come back from his brief holiday dejected and disheartened. It seemed to him that she who was his lode-star was more remote from him than she had ever been—more and more remote—vanishing into a distant world where it was vain for him to follow. He had failed in the task that she had imposed upon him. He was no nearer the solution of that dark mystery which troubled her life than he had been when he first promised to help her. How poor and impotent a creature he must appear in her eyes. His only discoveries had been negative. All that his keen, trained intellect, sharpened by seven years of legal experience, had been able to do was to prove the unsoundness of her own theory. He had started no theory upon

his part. No flash of genius had illumined the obscurity which surrounded Godfrey Carmichael's death.

He went on with his plodding work, resolutely bent upon doing the utmost that patient labour can do to insure success. Even if it were all vain and futile—that hope of winning favour in her eyes—the mere possibility of standing better with her, of showing her that he was of the stuff which goes to the making of distinguished men—even this was worth working for.

"She may have great offers by-and-by," he told himself, recalling what Lord Cheriton had said about his daughter's chances. "With her beauty and her expectations, to say nothing of her present means, she is sure of distinguished admirers; but at the worst she cannot look down upon a man who is on the road to success in her father's profession."

This ever-present consideration, joined to his love of his calling, sweetened all that was dry and dull in the initial stages of a barrister's career. While other men of his age were spending their evenings at the Gaiety Theatre, seeing the same burlesque and laughing at the same jokes night after night, as appetite grew with what it fed on, Theodore was content to sit in chambers and read law. It was not that he was wanting in appreciation of the drama. There was no man in London better able to enjoy the dignity of Hamlet at the Lyceum, or the rollicking fun of the Gaiety Bluebeard. He was no pedantic piece of clay, proud of the dulness that calls itself virtue. He was only an earnest worker, bent upon a given result, and able to put aside every hindrance upon the road that he was travelling.

"They that run in a race run all, but one obtaineth the prize," he said to himself, recalling a sentence in an epistle that he had learned years ago at his mother's knee, words that always brought back the cold brightness of early spring, and a period of extra church services, long sermons in the lamp-lit church, and the voices of strange preachers, a time of daffodils and fish dinners, and much talk of High and Low Church. He had never faltered in his religious convictions; yet in the days of his youth that Lenten season in a country town, that recurrent sound of church bells in the chilly March twilight, had weighed heavy upon his soul.

Almost the only recreation which he allowed himself in this winter season was an occasional attendance at Miss Newton's tea-parties. He had secured acceptance for himself at these entertainments on the strength of his reading, and he was now established as a Shakespearian reader; Miss Newton having taken it into her head that Shakespeare is of all great poets the easiest understood by the people, and having ordered him to read Shakespeare until she should tell him to desist.

"I know what they like and what they dislike," she said. "They'll

not conceal their feelings from me when we talk you over after you've gone. As soon as ever I find them getting tired I'll let you know."

He began with Macbeth, a story which caught them at the very first page. The witches took their breath away; and when he came to the murder scene they were all sitting round him with their hair seemingly on end. He closed his first reading with that awful knocking at the gate; that one supreme stage effect which has never yet been paralleled by mortal dramatist. There were some of the girls who tumbled off their chairs and grovelled on the floor in their excitement. There were others who wanted to know the fate of Macbeth and his wife on the instant.

"I do hope they were both hung, like the Mannings," said a meek widow.

"Oh, but *he* wasn't so much to blame, Mrs. Kirby. That wicked woman drove him to it."

"So did Mrs. Manning," argued a Bermondsey lady, "but they hung Manning all the same when they caught him. I was a child when it happened, but I remember hearing about them. He was took in Jersey, and she wore a black satin gownd."

"Oh, don't talk about your Mannings, Mrs. Hodge," cried one of the girls, indignantly. "They were low, vulgar people. These were a King and Queen in a palace. It's all different. It lifts one up out of one's own life only to hear about them. You may read about murders in the newspapers till your eyes begin to swim, but you won't feel like *that*. I don't know when I've felt so sorry for anybody as I feel for King Macbeth."

Marian sat silent, and refrained from all part in the chorus of criticism, but she moved to the piano presently and began to play a Scotch air—a grand old march—slow, solemn music that was almost too much for the nerves of the more excitable among Miss Newton's party. She glided from one melody to another, and she played those wild Scottish airs with such thrilling power that they seemed to sustain and intensify the uncanny effect of the tragic reading.

Theodore went over to the piano and stood beside her as she played.

"I knew you were a musician," he said, "though I never heard you touch the keys till to-night."

"How did you know?"

"My cousin Juanita told me. She remembered your playing in her mother's room when she was a child."

The woman called Marian lifted her eyes to him with a look of patient reproach, as if she said, "You are cruel to hit any one so helpless as I am," and then, playing all the time, she answered coldly,—

"I do not know what you are talking about."

"Don't you! Oh, but indeed I think you do, and I should be very glad to be of use to you if you would let me, for the sake of those old days. I don't think it is possible I can be mistaken, though you may have your own reason for refusing to confide in me."

He was certain now in his own mind that this was Mercy Porter and no other. That fine touch upon the piano implied sustained and careful cultivation. She did not play like a girl who had learnt music as an afterthought.

He left the house when she did, and walked part of the way to Hercules Buildings with her, but did not offer to go out of his way to see her home, being very sure she would refuse.

"I wish you would trust me," he said gently, as they walked side by side, without looking at each other. "Believe me that every one at Cheriton is sorry for you. If you were to go back to the neighbourhood you would have everybody's sympathy. There would be no one to cast a stone."

"I am very sorry I ever mentioned Cheriton to you, Mr. Dalbrook," she said impatiently. "It was a foolish impulse that made me talk. You insist upon making guesses. You try to force a confession from me. It is hardly generous."

"My interest in you must be my excuse."

"You can do me no good by that kind of interest. I shall never see Dorsetshire again—so what can it matter who I was when I lived in that part of the world. There are hundreds of women in London as lonely as I am—hundreds—perhaps thousands—who have broken every link with their past. My life suits me well enough, and I am contented. I shall never try to change it."

"That is a pity. You are young enough to make a good wife to an honest man, to help in creating a happy home."

"Am I? I feel a century old; and I have done with every thought of love or marriage. When I woke to consciousness after that dreadful fever, awoke from darkness and oblivion like that of the grave, I entered upon a new life. I came out of that sickness like one who had passed through hell. Passion and hope, and youth and good looks, had been burnt out of me in a fiery furnace. It was a wonder to myself that my body was alive. It was no wonder to me that my heart was dead. From that time I have lived very much as I am living now—after a brief time of struggle and starvation—and the life suits me fairly well. I shall never seek to better it."

"That is hard, Marian."

He called her by her Christian name, frankly, in almost paternal friendliness, not knowing any other name by which to call her.

He was with Miss Newton earlier than usual on the occasion of her next tea-drinking, so early as to be before anybody else, and he talked to his hostess about Marian—Marian Gray, Miss Newton called her,—confiding to her his conviction that this young woman

was no other than Mrs. Porter's missing daughter. He told her of his interview with Mrs. Porter, and of the mother's angry repudiation of her child.

"I can but think that her hardness was assumed," he said, "and that the ice would melt at a touch if the mother and daughter could be brought together. I should like to try the experiment."

"It is hardly wise to try experiments with human hearts," said Miss Newton. "Marian is contented and at peace, if not happy. To force her back upon a mother who might be hard and bitter to her—do you think that would be true kindness?"

"What if the mother's heart has been yearning for her lost lamb in all these years, and by bringing her back I might make two lives happy?"

"Let the mother come to the child. Let her who has something to forgive be the one to make the advance. It is so hard for the sinner to go back. She must be helped back. If the mother were a woman with a motherly heart, she would have been searching for her lost child in all those years, instead of wrapping herself up in her sorrow at home."

"I own I have thought that."

"Of course you have. You can't think otherwise as a sensible man. I have no patience with such a mother. As for Marian, I think she may get on very well as she is. I am fond of her, and I believe she is fond of me. She earns from twelve to fourteen shillings a week. She pays five shillings for her room, and she lives upon eightpence a day. I needn't tell you that the teapot is her *pièce de résistance.* Her most substantial meal on some days consists of a couple of scones from the Scotch baker's, or a penny loaf and a hard-boiled egg; but when I go to see her she gives me an admirable cup of tea, and positively delicious bread and butter. Her room is the very pink and pattern of neatness. All the instincts of a lady show themselves in that poor little two-pair back. She has curtained the iron bedstead and the window with white dimity, which is always clean and fresh, for she washes and irons it with her own hands. She generally contrives to have a bunch of flowers upon her work-table, and, hard as she works, her room is always free from litter. She has about half a dozen books of her own upon the mantelshelf, her Bible, Milton, Shakespeare, Charles Lamb's Essays, Goldsmith's Poems, and the 'Idyls of the King'—well-worn volumes, which have been her companions for years. She borrows other books from the Free Library, and her mind is always being cultivated. I really believe she is happy. She is one of those rare individuals who can afford to live alone. Do not disturb her lightly."

"You are right perhaps. The mother struck me as by no means a pleasant character, always supposing that Mrs. Porter is her mother, of which I myself have very little doubt."

Theodore made no further effort to bring mother and daughter together, but he met Marian from time to time at Miss Newton's tea-parties, and acquaintance ripened into friendship. Her refinement and her musical talent sustained his interest in her. He talked to her of books sometimes when they happened to be sitting side by side at the tea-table, and he was surprised at the extent of her reading. She confessed, when he questioned her, that she was in the habit of stealing two or three hours from the night for her books.

"I find that I can do with a few hours' sleep," she said, "if I lie down happy in my mind after being absorbed in a delightful book. My books are my life. They give me the whole universe for my world, though I have to live in one room, and to follow a very monotonous calling."

He admired the refinement of that purely intellectual nature, but he admired still more that admirable tact which regulated her intercourse with Miss Newton's homelier friends. Never by word or tone or half-involuntary glance did Marian betray any consciousness of superiority to the uncultivated herd. She shared their interests, she sympathized with their vexations, she neither smiled nor shuddered at Cockney twang or missing aspirate.

Winter brightened into spring, with all its varieties of good and evil; east winds rushing round street-corners, and cutting into the pedestrian like a knife; west winds enfolding him like a balmy caress, and bringing the perfume of violets, the vivid yellow of daffodils into the wilderness of brick and stone; rainy days, grey, monotonous, dismal, hanging on the soul like a curtain of gloom and hopelessness. These made up the sum of Theodore's outer life. Within he had his books, his ambition, and his faithful love. He told himself that it was a hopeless love; but there are many things which a man tells himself, and tries to believe, and yet does not believe. The very human longing for blessedness is too strong for human wisdom. Where there is love, there is always hope.

He had grown accustomed to his life in chambers; and albeit he was much attached to his father, and was amiably tolerant of his brother and sisters, he could but feel that this solitary existence better suited his temper than residence in a family circle. At Dorchester it had been very difficult for him to be alone. Out of business hours his sisters considered that they had a claim upon him, a right to waste his life in the most trivial amusements and engagements. If he withdrew himself from their society, and that of their numerous dearest friends, they accused him of grumpiness, and thought themselves ill-treated. He had chafed against the waste of life, the utter futility of those engagements which prevented his keeping level with the intellectual growth of the age. He felt

that his youth was slipping from under him, leaving him stationary, when every pulse of his being beat impatiently for progress. And now it was pleasant to him to be his own master, free to make the best possible use of his days. He found a few friends in London whose society suited him, and only a few. Among these the man of whom he saw most was Cuthbert Ramsay, a young Scotchman, who had been his chief companion at Cambridge, who had studied medicine for three years in Leipsic and Paris with Ludwig and Pasteur, and who was now at St. Thomas's. The two young men ran up against each other in that main artery of London life, the Strand, in the January twilight, and renewed the friendly intimacy of that bygone time when Ramsay had been at Trinity and Dalbrook at Trinity Hall. They dined together at a restaurant on the evening of that first meeting, and after dinner Theodore took his friend to his chambers, where the two sat late into the night talking over college reminiscences of hall and river.

Cuthbert Ramsay had been one of the most remarkable undergraduates of those days, notable alike for mental and physical gifts which lifted him out of the ruck. He was six feet two—with the form of an athlete and as handsome a face as was ever seen within the gates of Trinity,—and these advantages of person, which would have been noteworthy in any man, were the more remarkable in him, because of his utter indifference to them, or, perhaps, it may be said, complete unconsciousness of them. He knew that he was a big man, because his tailor told him as much; but he had never taken into consideration the question as to whether he was or was not a handsome man; indeed, except when he had his hair cut, an operation which he always submitted to unwillingly and of dire necessity, it is doubtful if he ever looked into a glass long enough to know what manner of man he was—certainly not at his morning toilet, when he moved restlessly about the room, hairbrushes in hand, belabouring his handsome head, and exercising his extraordinary memory by the repetition of some scientific formula acquired during the previous night's reading.

His own estimate of his appearance was comprised in the idea that he was "very Scotch." That milky whiteness of complexion, touched with just enough ruddy colour to give life to the face, those brilliant blue eyes, the straight nose, clear-cut nostrils, firm lips and firmer chin, the high broad brow, and crisp auburn hair, constituted to his mind nothing more than his brevet of nationality.

"No one would ever take me for anything but a Scotchman," he would say lightly, if any acquaintance ventured to hint at his good looks. "There's no mistake about me. Albion is written on my brow."

From his childhood upwards he had cared only for large things—intent upon investigation and discovery from the time he could

crawl—asking the most searching questions of mother and of nurse—prying into those abstract mysteries which perplex philosophers before he could speak plain. The thirst for knowledge had grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength. His hardy boyhood had been spent for the most part in the windy streets of Aberdeen, marching with swinging stride along that granite pavement, his shabby red gown flapping in the north-easter; faring anyhow, as indifferent to what he ate as he was to what he wore; ahead of his fellows in all things intellectual, and abreast with the best athletes of his year in the sports they valued,—a king among men; and of such a happy disposition that nothing in life came amiss to him, and what would have been hardship to another seemed sport to him.

Some one, a wealthy member of his extensive family, found out that this Cuthbert was no common youth, and that with a little encouragement he might do honour to the clan. This distant kinsman, one of the heads of the great house of Ramsay, sent him to Cambridge, where he entered as a scholar of his college, and at the end of a year gained a University scholarship, which made him independent. This hardy youth from the city of Bon Accord was able to live upon so little—could not for the life of him have been extravagant, having none of that *mollesse*, or soft self-indulgence, which is at the root of most men's squanderings. He was nine and twenty years of age, and he had never worn a gardenia, and had only had one suit of dress clothes since he grew to man's estate. Needless to say that albeit he went out very seldom that suit was now somewhat shabby; but Cuthbert's superb appearance neutralized the shabbiness, and he looked the finest man in any assembly. His parents were in their graves before he left the University. He had no ties. He was free as Adam would have been if Eve had never been created. There was no one near or dear to him to feel proud of his honours, though his name was high in the list of Wranglers, and he had taken a first-class in science. And now, after that interval of serious scientific work in Leipsic and Paris, he was plodding at St. Thomas's with a view to a London degree, and thus the two hard-working young men—very intimate in the old days when Cuthbert's rooms in the Bishop's Hostel were conveniently adjacent to Theodore's ground floor in Trinity Hall—were thrown together again upon their life-journey, and were honestly glad to renew the old friendship.

Ramsay was delighted with his friend's chambers.

"I was afraid there was nothing so good as this left in the Temple," he said, rapturously contemplating the blackened old wainscot, and the low ceiling with its heavy cross-beam. "I thought smartness and brand-new stone had superseded all that was historical and interesting within the precincts of the Lamb. But these rooms of

yours have the true smack. Why, I really believe now, Dalbrook, you must have rats behind that wainscot?"

"Perhaps I had, till Miss Nipper came to keep me company," answered Theodore, patting the terrier, whose neat little head and intelligent ears were lifted at the sound of her name.

"And Nipper has made them emigrate to the next house, no doubt?"

"I'm glad you like my rooms, Cuthbert."

"Like them! I envy you the ownership more than I can say. If anything can make me sorry that I am not a lawyer it would be the fact that I can't live in the Temple. We doctors have no distinctive abode, nothing associated with the past."

"Perhaps that is because medicine is essentially a progressive science."

"Is it? Sometimes I begin to doubt if it has made any progress since Galen—or Albertus Magnus. I will admit that there was progress of some kind up to *his* time."

"This house has an interest for me that it would have for no one else," said Theodore, presently, while his friend filled his briar-wood. "My kinsman, Lord Cheriton, occupied the rooms underneath these for about a dozen years; and it is a fancy of mine to keep his image before me as I sit here alone with my books. It reminds me of what a man can do in the profession which so many of my friends declare to be hopeless."

"No one knows anything about it, Theodore. If you went into statistics you would find that the chances of success in the learned professions are pretty nearly equal. So many men will get on, and so many will fail, at every trade, in every calling. The faculty of success lies in the man himself. I always thought you were the kind of man to do well in whatever line you hit upon. A calm, clear brain and a resolute will are the first factors in the sum of life. And so Lord Cheriton lived in this house, did he? I have heard people talk of him as a very distinguished man, as well as a very lucky one. By-the-by, it was in his house that strange murder occurred last year."

"Yes, it was in his house, and it was his daughter's husband who was murdered."

"Tell me the story, Theodore," said Ramsay, leaning back his handsome head, and half closing his eyes, with the air of a man who liked hearing about murders. "I read the account in the papers at the time, but I've very nearly forgotten all about it."

Theodore complied, and gave his friend the history of the case, and the failure of every attempt to find the murderer.

"And there has been nothing discovered since last summer?"

"Nothing!"

"That is rather hard upon Lord Cheriton—bearing in mind your

detective's suggestion of a vendetta. The vendetta would not be likely to close with the death of Sir Godfrey Carmichael. Hatred would demand further victims—Lord Cheriton himself perhaps—or this lovely young widow,—but there could hardly be such a vindictive feeling without a strong cause. Enmity so deadly must have had a beginning in a profound sense of wrong."

"I have studied the case from that point of view, but can discover no cause for such malignity. I have almost given up all hope of unravelling the mystery."

"And your kinsman is to live under the sword of Damocles for the rest of his life? Upon my soul I pity him. I can imagine nothing in Ireland worse than the murder of Sir Godfrey Carmichael—a man seated peacefully in his own drawing-room; and a high-principled, amiable young man, you tell me, who never was known to wrong his fellow-man."

Theodore Dalbrook did not spend his Easter holidays in Dorsetshire. He had heard from his sisters that Juanita was staying at Swanage with Lady Jane Carmichael. He was unwilling to intrude upon her there, and he had nothing to communicate upon the subject which was at present his only claim upon her interest. Under these circumstances he was easily persuaded to spend his vacation in a ten days' trip to Holland with Cuthbert Ramsay, who was keenly interested in the result of some experiments which had lately been made at Leyden; and thus it happened that Theodore let some time go by without seeing any member of his family except his father, who came to London occasionally upon business, and whom his son was delighted to entertain and make much of in his chambers or at his club, the serviceable Constitutional.

Towards the end of April he read an announcement in the papers which had touched him almost to tears.

"On the 23rd inst., at Milbrook Priory, the widow of Sir Godfrey Carmichael, of a posthumous son."

He was thankful for her sake that this new interest had been given to her days—that a new and fair horizon was open to her in this young life, with all its possibilities of love and gladness. It might be that the coming of this child would change the current of her thoughts, that the stern desire for retribution would grow less keen, that the agonizing sense of loss would be softened almost to forgetfulness. He remembered those lovely lines of the poet philosopher's—

> "A child, more than all other gifts,
> Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts."

This child came, he hoped, freighted with healing and comfort,

came like the glad spring-time itself, like Adonis or Persephone, with his arms full of flowers.

He wrote to his cousin, in tenderest congratulation, a letter breathing a generous affection, without one selfish thought lurking between the lines.

Her answer came after nearly a month's delay, but, although tardy, it was most delightful to him. Juanita asked him to be godfather to her boy; and he could easily imagine that this was the highest honour she could offer him.

"In London half the young men I used to meet took a pride in avowing their unbelief," she wrote, "but I know that you are not ashamed to acknowledge your faith in Christ and His Church. I shall feel secure that what you promise for my child will be fulfilled, so far as it is in your power to bring about its fulfilment. I know that if you stand beside the font and take those vows in His name you will not remember that ceremony as an empty form, a mere concession to usage and respectability. Those promises will appeal to you for my fatherless child in the days to come. They will make you his friend and protector."

He accepted the trust with greater gladness than he had felt about anything that had happened to him for a long time; and on a balmy morning in the last week of May he found himself standing by the font of the old Saxon church at Milbrook where he had heard the solemn words of the Burial Service read above Sir Godfrey Carmichael's coffin less than a year before. He took upon himself the custody of the infant's conscience in all good faith, and he felt that this trust which his cousin had given to him made a new link between them.

The Grenvilles had come down from town to be present at the ceremony, though neither husband nor wife was officially concerned in it. Mrs. Grenville had seized the opportunity to bring Johnnie and Godolphin to Dorsetshire for change of air. She had an idea that the Purbeck air had a particularly revivifying effect upon them —like unto no other air.

"I suppose that is because it is my native air," she explained.

Mr. Grenville submitted to his nephew's existence as a mysterious dispensation of Providence, which it became him to endure with gentleman-like fortitude, but he did not cease to regard a posthumous infant as a solecism in nature and society.

"Your sister-in-law actually seems pleased with her baby," he told his wife, grumblingly, as he put on a frock coat in honour of the approaching ceremony; "but it appears to me that a woman of refined feeling would be impressed with a sense of incongruity—of indelicacy even—in the idea of a child born such ages after the father's death—a sort of no-man's-baby. And upon my word it is uncommonly hard upon Thomas. With such a family

as ours—five and the possibilities of the future—it would have been a grand thing to have one well provided for. As things stand now they must *all* be paupers."

Lord Cheriton was Theodore's fellow-sponsor, and Lady Jane was godmother, an office which filled the dear soul with rapture. She held her grandchild throughout the service, except when she delivered him gingerly to the priest, who, at one stage of the ceremony, carried the new-made Christian halfway up the aisle, and, as it were, flaunted him in the face of the scanty congregation.

Juanita stood like a statue while these rites were being celebrated, and in her pale set face there was none of the tender interest which a mother might be expected to show upon such an occasion. There was a deep pathos in that marble face and those black garments in an hour which has generally something of a festal aspect. Strangers thought her cold, a proud, hard young woman, thinking more of her own importance, perhaps, than of her baby; yet could they have read beneath the surface they would have pitied the girl-widow in her desolation on this day which should have been blessed to her. She could but think of him who was not there; of the father who had been fated never to look upon his son's face; of the son who was to grow from infancy to manhood without the knowledge of a father's love.

Theodore watched that pale and lovely face, full of sympathy, but not without wonder. How would this new tie affect her? Would it soften all that was hard and vindictive in her mind—would it be strong enough to bring about resignation to the will of Heaven—a patient waiting upon Providence, instead of that feverish eagerness to exact a life for a life?

They two were alone together for only a few minutes after luncheon, strolling along the broad gravel walk in front of the dining-room windows, in the afternoon sunshine, while Lord Cheriton and Mr. Grenville lingered over coffee and cigars, and Lady Jane and her daughter made a domestic group with children and nurses under a gigantic Japanese umbrella. Short as that *tête-à-tête* was it convinced Theodore that the child had not brought oblivion of the father's fate.

"You have heard nothing more—made no new discovery, I suppose?" Juanita said, nervously.

"Nothing. Indeed, Juanita, I fear I have no talent as an amateur detective. I am not likely to succeed where Mr. Churton failed. It was easy enough for me to complete the record of the Strangways—to set your suspicions at rest with regard to them. *That* was plain sailing. But it seems to me I shall never go any further."

"I'm afraid you will not," she said, wearily; "and yet I had such

hope in your cleverness—your determination to help me. As a lawyer you would know how to set about it. The London detective has many cases—his mind travels from one to another. He has no leisure to think deeply about anything—but you who have had so much leisure of late—you would, I know, be glad to help me."

"Glad! Good God, Juanita, you must know that I would cut off my hand to give you ease or comfort—respite even from a passing trouble. And if you are really set upon this thing—if your peace is really dependent upon the discovery of your husband's murderer——"

"It is, it is, Theodore. I cannot know rest or comfort while his death remains unpunished. I cannot lie down in peace at night while I know that the wretch who killed him is walking about, rejoicing in his wickedness, glad to have destroyed that blameless life, laughing at our feeble love which can let our dead go unavenged."

"If cudgelling these poor brains of mine could bring me any nearer to the truth, Juanita," Theodore said, with a troubled sigh, "I should have helped you better; but so far I can see no ray of light in the thick darkness. I do not think any efforts of ours will solve the mystery. Only some accident, some inconceivable imprudence on the part of the murderer can put us on his track."

And then he thought with horror of Ramsay's idea that a hatred so malignant as that which had killed Godfrey Carmichael might reveal itself in some new crime. He thought of the young mother bending over her infant's cradle in some unguarded room—calm in the fancied safety of her English home. He thought of her wandering alone in park or wood, while that rabid hatred lurked in the shadow, waiting and watching for the moment of attack. The horror of the idea chilled him to the heart, but he was careful not to hint at that horror to Juanita. He seized the first opportunity of being alone with Lady Jane, and imparted his fears, founded upon that suggestion of Cuthbert Ramsay's to her. The kind creature was quick to take alarm, and promised to see that Juanita was guarded at all hours by all precautions that could be taken without alarming her.

"She is surrounded with old and faithful servants," said Lady Jane; "a hint to them will put them on their guard; but if you thought it wiser I would take her away from this place—take her away from England, if necessary. It is horrible to think of living at the mercy of an unknown foe."

"My friend's notion may be groundless. The crime of last year may have been an isolated act—the inspiration of madness. In our efforts to account for the unaccountable we may invent theories

which torture us, and which may yet have no ground in fact. Only it is as well to think of possibilities, however hideous."

He spent one night at the Priory, and before departure next morning presented his offering of a fine George the Second mug to his godson, Godfrey James Dalbrook—who in his present stage of existence seemed to his godfather a scarcely distinguishable morsel of humanity smothered in overmuch cambric and Valenciennes.

"I'm afraid if I were to meet my godson in the arms of a strange nurse I should not know him," he said, deprecatingly, after he had kissed the rosebud mouth, "but, please God, the time will come when he and I will be firm friends. As soon as he is old enough to decline *mensa* I shall feel that we can converse upon a common footing, and when he goes to Eton I shall renew my youth every time I run down to waste an hour in the playing fields watching him at cricket, or to drive him to the 'White Hart.'"

Although he put on an air of cheerfulness in his leave-taking, he left the Priory with a sense of deepest anxiety; and it was almost a relief to him when he received a letter from Lady Jane a week afterwards.

"I could not get over the uneasy feeling which your suggestion awakened," she wrote, "so I am going to carry off mother and child to Switzerland the day after to-morrow. Interlaken and Grindelwald are delightful at this season. We shall return to Dorsetshire as soon as the tourists begin to invade our retreat, and I trust in God that some discovery may be made in the meantime, so that all our minds may be more at ease."

CHAPTER XXI.

"Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,
That time will come and take my love away.
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose."

THAT ghastly idea mooted by Cuthbert Ramsay—the idea of an unsatisfied hatred still hovering like a bird of prey over the heads of Juanita and her child, ready to make its deadly swoop in the hour that should see her most helpless and unprotected—gave a new impetus to Theodore's mind, and he applied himself again to the apparently hopeless endeavour to find the motive of the murder and the person of the murderer.

As an initial step he invited Mr. Churton to dine with him at his chambers, entertained that gentleman with a well-chosen little dinner sent in from a famous tavern in the Strand, and a bottle of unexceptionable port after dinner; and by this innocent means got the detective into an expansive frame of mind, and induced him to discuss the Cheriton murder in all its bearings.

The result of the long evening's talk differed in hardly any point from the opinion which Mr. Churton had formulated at Cheriton. The motive of the murder must be looked for in some past wrong, or fancied wrong, inflicted upon the murderer. And again Mr. Churton returned to his point that there was a woman at the bottom of it.

"Do you mean that a woman fired the shot?"

"Decidedly not. I mean that a woman was the motive power. Women are not given to avenging their wrongs with their own hands. They will instigate the men who love them to desperate crimes—unconsciously perhaps—for they are the first to howl when the crime has been committed, and the lover's neck is in danger. But jealousy is the most powerful factor of all, and I take it jealousy was at the bottom of the Cheriton crime. I take it that some intrigue of Sir Godfrey's youth was at the root of the matter."

"Strange as you may consider such a belief, Mr. Churton, I am inclined to think that Sir Godfrey's youth was innocent of intrigues—that he never loved any woman except my cousin, whom he adored from the time he was eighteen, when she was a lovely child

of eleven. It was a very romantic attachment, and the kind of attachment which keeps a man clear of low associations."

"You and Lord Cheriton tell me the same story, sir," said the detective, with a touch of impatience; "but if this immaculate young man never injured anybody, how do you account for that bullet?"

"It is unaccountable, except upon a far-fetched hypothesis."

"What may that be?"

"That the act of vengeance—though striking Godfrey Carmichael—was aimed at Lord Cheriton; that the blow was meant to ruin his daughter's life, and by ricochet strike him to the heart. I think we have spoken of this possibility before to-night."

After that evening with Churton, Theodore made up his mind that there was no assistance to be looked for from this quarter. The detective had exhausted his means of investigation, and had nothing further to suggest. He was too practical a man to waste time or thought upon speculative theories. Theodore saw, therefore, that if he were to pursue the subject further he must think and work for himself.

After considering the question from every possible point of view, he became the more established in the idea that Godfrey Carmichael had been the scapegoat of another man's sin, the vicarious victim whose death was to strike at a guilty life. Of his youth it was easy to know all that there was to be known. He had lived in the sight of his fellow-men, a young man of too much social importance to be able to hide any youthful indiscretions or wrong-doing. But what of that other and so much longer life? What of the early struggles of the self-made man? What of the history of James Dalbrook in those long years of bachelor life in London, when he was slowly working his way to the front? Might not there have been some hidden sin in that life, some sin dark enough to awaken a sleepless vengeance, a malignity which should descend upon him in the day of peace and prosperity like a thunderbolt from a clear and quiet sky?

A man who marries at forty years of age has generally some kind of history before his marriage; and it was in that history Theodore told himself he must look for the secret of Godfrey Carmichael's death. He was loyal to his kinsman and his friend; he was inspired by no prurient curiosity, no envious inclination to belittle the great man; he was prompted solely by his desire to unearth the hidden foe, and to provide for the safety of Juanita's future life.

Meditating upon his past intercourse with Lord Cheriton, and upon every familiar conversation which he was able to recall, he was surprised to find how very little his kinsman had ever related of his London life, before the time when he took silk and married a

rich wife. His allusions to that earlier period had been of the briefest. He had shown none of that egotistical pleasure which most successful men feel in talking of their struggles, and the rosy dawn of fame, those first triumphs, small perhaps in themselves, but the after-taste of which is sweeter in the mouth than the larger victories of the flood-tide. He had never talked of any affairs of the heart, any of those lighter flirtations and unfinished romances which elderly men love to recall. His history, so far as it could be judged by his conversation, had been a blank.

Either the man must have been a legal machine, a passionless piece of human clay, caring for nothing but professional achievement, in those eighteen years of manhood between his call to the Bar and his marriage, or he had lived a life which he could not afford to talk about. He was either of a duller clay than his fellow-men, or he had a hidden history.

Now, as it was hardly possible that James Dalbrook, judged from either a psychological or a physiological standpoint, could have been dull and cold, and plodding, and passionless, at any period of his career, there remained the inference that he had a secret history.

Living under the very roof that had sheltered his cousin in the greater part of his professional career, Theodore Dalbrook arrived at this conclusion.

What kind of a life had he lived, that young barrister, briefless and friendless at the outset, whose name was eventually to become a power, a weight bringing down the judicial scale on the side of victory, just as Archer's riding was supposed to secure the winning of a race. How had he lived in those early years, when the fight was all before him? What friends had he made for himself, and what enemies? What love, or what hate, had agitated his existence?

The investigator could only approach the question in the most commonplace manner. It was nearly a quarter of a century since James Dalbrook had been a tenant of that ground-floor set, above which Theodore was pacing up and down in the summer dusk. He had to find some one who remembered him at that time.

It would not be his present laundress, a buxom matron of about five and thirty, who had never been known to any present inhabitant of Ferret Court without the encumbrance of a baby in arms, or a baby at the breast. As fast as one baby was disposed of, there was another coming forward to take its place. She always brought her baby with her, and left it about in obscure corners, like an umbrella. It was always of the order of infant designated good; that is to say, it was not a squalling baby. There were some of Mrs. Armstrong's clients who suspected her of keeping it in a semi-

narcotized condition in the interests of her profession; but when this practice was hinted at the matron referred to the necessities of teething, and hoped she did not require to be reminded of her duty as a mother.

This good person brought in the lighted lamp while Theodore was pacing up and down the narrow limits of his sitting-room. She placed the lamp on the table, looked inquiringly at her employer, and then retired, only to return with the tea-tray, which she arranged lingeringly. She was a talkative person, with an active intellect, and it irked her to leave the room without any scrap of conversation, were it only an inquiry about the postman, or a casual remark upon the weather.

Nothing being forthcoming from Mr. Dalbrook, she withdrew to the door, but paused upon the threshold and dropped a curtsey.

"I'm afraid we're going to have a storm to-night, sir," she said.

The fear was a thing of the moment, inspired by her desire to talk.

"Do you think so, Mrs. Armstrong?"

"I do, indeed, sir. It couldn't be that 'eavy if there wasn't thunder in the air."

"Perhaps not," replied Theodore, indifferently. "Ah! by the way, how long have you looked after these chambers?"

"From three years before I was married, sir."

"Is that long?"

"Lor', yes, sir; I should think it was! Why, my Joseph was thirteen on his last birthday!"

"Let me see; that would mean about seventeen years, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I suppose you knew nothing about the chambers before that time."

"I won't say that, sir. I've known them more or less ever since I could run alone. Mother looked after them before me. It was only when the rheumatics took such firm hold of her"—this was said as if Theodore were thoroughly posted in the case—"that mother gave up. She had done for the gentlemen in this house for over twenty years; though when she married father she never thought to have to do such work as this, he being a master carpenter and cabinet-maker with a nice business—and she'd been brought up different, and had more education than any of *us* ever had."

"Then your mother must have known this house when Mr. Dalbrook had the ground floor—the Mr. Dalbrook who is now Lord Cheriton," said Theodore, cutting short this biographical matter.

"I should think she did, sir. Many's the time I've heard her talk of him. He was just like you, sir, in his ways, as far as I can gather —very quiet and very studious. She waited upon him for nearly twelve years, so she ought to be a judge of his character."

"I should like to have a chat with your mother some of these days, Mrs. Armstrong."

"Would you, sir? I'm sure she'd be delighted. She loves talking over old times. She's none of your Radicals, that are all for changing things, like my husband. She looks up to her superiors, and she feels quite proud of having done for Lord Cheriton when he was just like any other young gentleman in Ferret Court. Any time you'd like to step round to our place, sir, mother would be happy to see you. She'd be glad to wait upon you, but she's crippled with the rheumatics, and it's as much as she can do to get upstairs of a night and downstairs of a morning."

"I'll call upon her to-morrow afternoon, if that will be convenient."

"No fear of that, sir. Shall I look round at four o'clock and show you where she lives, sir? It's not above five minutes' walk."

"If you please. I shall be very much obliged."

Gadbolt's Lane was one of the obscurest alleys between the Temple and St. Bride's Church, but it was as well known in the locality as if it had been Regent Street. Thither Mrs. Armstrong conducted her employer on a sultry June afternoon, and admitted him with her own private key into one of the narrowest houses he had ever seen—a house of three stories, with one window in each story, and with a tiny street door squeezed in between the parlour window and the next house—a house which, if it had stood alone, would have been a tower. Upon the narrow street door appeared a wide brass plate inscribed with the name of "J. W. Armstrong, plumber," and in the parlour window were exhibited various indications of the plumbing trade. On a smaller brass plate just below the knocker appeared the modest legend, "Miss Mobley, ladies' own materials made up."

The little parlour behind the plumber's emblems was very close and stuffy upon this midsummer afternoon, for Mrs. Dugget's complaint necessitated a fire in season and out of season; but it was also spotlessly clean, and preparations had evidently been made for an afternoon tea of an especially delicate character. There was a rack of such thin, dry toast as Mrs. Armstrong's employer affected, and there was a choice pat of Aylesbury butter, set forth upon the whitest of table-cloths, and flanked by a glass jar of jam, the glass receptacle being of that ornate character which dazzles the purchaser into comparative indifference as to the quality of the jam;

just as admiring man, caught by outward beauty, is apt to shut his eyes to the lack of more lasting charms in the way of temper and character.

"Mother thought perhaps you'd honour her by taking a cup of tea this warm afternoon, sir," said Mrs. Armstrong, when Theodore had seated himself opposite the invalid, "and then you can have your little talk over old times while I look after Armstrong's supper. He'll eat any bit I choose to give him for his dinner, and there's days he don't get no dinner at all, but he always looks for something tasty for supper, don't he, mother?"

Mrs. Dugget acknowledged this trait in her son-in-law's character, and Theodore having graciously accepted her hospitality, Mrs. Armstrong poured out the tea, and waited upon the distinguished guest, and, having done this, withdrew to her domestic duties. She was visible in front of the window five minutes afterwards, setting out with a basket over her arm, evidently in quest of the "something tasty" that was needful to her husband's well-being.

"Your daughter tells me that you remember my cousin, Lord Cheriton, when he was Mr. Dalbrook," said Theodore, when he and the old woman were alone together, except for the presence of a very familiar black cat, which pushed its chilly nose into Theodore's hand, and rubbed its sleek fur against Theodore's legs, with an air of slavish adulation.

"It isn't everybody that Tom takes to," said Mrs. Dugget, touched by her favourite's conduct. "He's a rare judge of character, is Tom. I've had him from a kitten, and his mother before him. Yes, sir, I ought to remember his lordship, seeing that I waited upon him for over eleven years; and a quiet gentleman he was to attend upon, giving next to no trouble, and never using bad language, or coming home the worse for drink, as I've known a gentleman behave in that very set."

"Did he live in his chambers all that time?"

"Well, sir, nominally he did, but actually he didn't. He had his bedroom and his bath-room, just as you have; and the rooms was furnished pretty comfortable, and everything about them was very neat, for he was uncommonly particular, was Mr. Dalbrook; and he was always there of a day, and all day long, except when he was at the law courts, for there never was a more persevering gentleman. But after the first three years I can't say that he *lived* in Ferret Court. He came there by nine or ten o'clock every morning; and sometimes he stayed till ten o'clock at night, and sometimes he left as early as five in the afternoon; but he didn't live there no more after the third year, when he was beginning to get on a bit. There was his rooms, and there was nothing altered, except that he took away his dressing-case and a good many of his clothes; but there was everything left that he wanted for his toilet,

and all in apple-pie order for him to fall back upon his old ways at any time. Only, as I said before, he didn't live there no longer; and instead of having his dinner in his own room at seven o'clock, he never took anything more than a biscuit and a glass of sherry, or a brandy and soda."

"Did this change in his habits come about suddenly?"

"Yes, sir, it did; without an hour's warning. I comes to his rooms one morning and finds that his bed hasn't been slept in, and I finds a little bit of a pencil note from him to say that he would be stopping out of town for a few days. He was away over a fortnight, and from that time to the end of my service in Ferret Court, he never spent another night there."

"He had taken lodgings out of town, I conclude? I suppose you knew his other address?"

"No, sir, he never told me where his home was, for of course he must have had a home somewhere. No man would be a waif and stray for all those years—above all, such a steady-going gentleman as Mr. Dalbrook. I've heard other gentlemen accuse him of being a hermit. 'One never sees you nowhere,' they says. 'You're as steady as Old Time,' they says. And so he was; but he was very secret with his steadiness."

"Had you any idea where that second home of his was—in what part of the suburbs? It could not have been very far from London, since you say he came to his chambers before ten o'clock every morning."

"It was oftener nine than ten, sir," said Mrs. Dugget.

She paused a little before replying to his question, watching him with a sly smile as he caressed the obtrusive cat. She had her own notions as to the motive of his curiosity. He had expectations from Lord Cheriton, perhaps, and he wanted to discover if there were anything in the background of his kinsman's history which was likely to interfere with the fruition of his mercenary hopes.

"It was a good many years after Mr. Dalbrook left off sleeping at his chambers that I made a sort of discovery," she said; "and I knew my place too well to take any advantage of that discovery. But still I had my suspicions, and I believe they were not far off the truth."

"What was the nature of your discovery?"

"Oh, well, you see, sir, it wasn't much to talk about, only it set me thinking. It was two or three years before Mr. Dalbrook left Ferret Court and went to that first floor set in King's Bench Walk, but he was beginning to be a great man, and he had more work than he could do, slave as hard as he might; and he did slave, I can tell you, sir. His rooms in Ferret Court were very shabby—they hadn't had a bit of paint or a pail of whitewash for I don't know how long;

so, just before the Long Vacation, he says to me, 'I'm going to get these rooms done up, Mrs. Dugget, while I'm out of town. I've got a estimate from a party in Holborn, and he's to paint the wainscot and clear coal the ceiling, and do the whole thing for nine pounds seven and eightpence, in a workmanlike manner. You'll please to clean up after him, and do away with all the waste paper and rubbish, and get everything tidy before November."

Mrs. Dugget paused, and refreshed herself with half a cup of tea, and apologized for the obtrusiveness of the cat.

"I hope you don't object to cats, sir."

Theodore smiled, reflecting that any man who objected to cats would have fled from that stuffy parlour before now.

"No, I am rather fond of them, as an inferior order of dog. Well, now, as to this discovery of yours, Mrs. Dugget?"

"I'm coming to it as fast as I can, sir. You must know that there was a lot of waste paper in one of the closets beside the fireplace, and you are aware how roomy those closets in Ferret Court are. I never held with burning waste paper, first because it's dangerous with regard to fire, and next because they'll give you three shillings a sack for it at some of the paper mills; so I had alway emptied the waste-paper baskets into this closet, which was made no other use of, and the bottom of the closet was chock-full of old letters, envelopes, pamphlets, and such like. So I took my sack, and I sat down on the floor and filled it. Now, as I was putting in the papers by handfuls—taking my time over it, for the painters wasn't coming till the following Monday, and all my gentlemen was away on their holidays—I was struck by seeing such a number of envelopes addressed to the same name—

'J. Danvers, Esq.,
'Myrtle Cottage,
'Camberwell Grove.'

How did Mr. Dalbrook come to have all those envelopes belonging to Mr. Danvers? There must have been letters inside the envelopes, and what business had he with Mr. Danvers's letters?"

"They may have been letters bearing upon some case on which he was engaged," said Theodore.

"So they might, sir; but would *he* have the letters?" asked the laundress shrewdly. "Wouldn't that be the solicitor's business?"

"You are right, Mrs. Dugget. I see you have profited by your experience in the Temple."

"I had the curiosity to look at the post-marks on those envelopes, sir. There was over a hundred of 'em, I should think, some whole, and some torn across, and the post-marks told me that they spread over years. They most of 'em looked like tradesmen's envelopes,

and the Camberwell post-mark was on a good many of 'em. That closet hadn't been cleared out for eight or nine years, to my knowledge, and those envelopes went back for the best part of that time, and the longer I looked at them the more I wondered who Mr. Danvers was."

"And did you come to any conclusion at last?"

"Well, sir, I had my own idea about it, but it isn't my place to say what that idea was."

"Come, come, Mrs. Dugget, you have no employer now, and you are beholden to no one. You are a free agent, and have a perfect right to give expression to your opinion."

"If I thought it would go no further, sir."

"It shall go no further."

"Very well then, sir, to be candid, I thought that James Dalbrook and J. Danvers, Esq., were the same person, and that Mr. Dalbrook had been living in Camberwell Grove under an assumed name."

"Would not that seem a very curious thing for a professional man in Mr. Dalbrook's position to do?" inquired Theodore, gravely.

"It might seem curious to you, sir, but I've seen a good deal of professional gentlemen in my time, and it didn't strike me as very uncommon. Gentlemen have their own reasons for what they do, and the more particular they are from a professional point of view the more convenient they may find it to make a little alteration in their names now and again."

Mrs. Dugget looked at him with a significant shrewdness, which gave her the air of a female Mephistopheles, a creature deeply versed in all things evil.

"Did your curiosity prompt you to try and verify your suspicions?" he asked.

The old woman looked at him searchingly before she answered, as if trying to discover what value there might be for him in any information she had it in her power to give or to withhold. So far she had been carried along by her inherent love of gossip, stimulated by the wish to stand well with her daughter's employer, and perhaps with a view to such small amenities as a pound of tea or a bottle of whisky. But at this point something in Theodore's earnest manner suggested to her that her knowledge of his kinsman's life might have a marketable value, and she therefore became newly reticent.

"It doesn't become me to talk about a gentleman like Mr. Dalbrook, your namesake and blood relation, too, sir," she said, folding her rheumatic hands meekly. "I'm afraid I've made too free with my tongue already."

Theodore did not answer her immediately. He took a letter-case from his breast-pocket, and slowly and deliberately extracted two

crisp bank-notes from one of the divisions. These he opened and spread calmly and carefully on the table, smoothing out their crisp freshness, which crackled under his hand.

There is something very pleasant in the aspect of a new bank-note; money created expressly, as it were, for the first owner; virgin wealth, pure and uncontaminated by the dealings of the multitude. These were only five-pound notes, it is true, the lowest in the scale of English paper-money—in the eye of a millionaire infinitesimal as the grains of sand on the sea-shore—yet to Mrs. Dugget those two notes lying on the table in front of her suggested vast wealth. It is doubtful if she had ever seen two notes together in the whole of her previous experience. Her largest payment was a quarter's rent, her largest receipt had been a quarter's wages. She had managed to save a little money in the course of her laborious days, but her savings had been accumulated in sovereigns and half-sovereigns, which had been promptly transferred to the savings bank. Bank-notes to her mind were the symbols of surplus wealth.

"Now, I am not going to beat about the bush, Mrs. Dugget," said Theodore, with a matter-of-fact air. "I have a great respect for my kinsman, Lord Cheriton, who has been a kind friend to me. You may be assured, therefore, that if I am curious about his past life, I mean him no harm. I have reasons of my own, which it is not convenient for me to explain, for wanting to know all about his early struggles, his friends, and his enemies. I feel perfectly sure that you followed up your discovery of those envelopes—that you took the trouble to find Myrtle Cottage, and to ascertain the kind of people who lived there." Her face told him that he was right. "If you choose to be frank with me, and tell me all you can, those two five-pound notes are very much at your service. If you prefer to hold your tongue, I can only wish you good afternoon, and try to make my discoveries unaided, which will not be very easy after a lapse of over twenty years."

"I don't want to keep any useful information from you, sir, provided you'll promise not to let anything I may tell you get to Lady Cheriton's ears. I shouldn't like to make unhappiness between man and wife."

"I promise that Lady Cheriton shall not be made unhappy by any indiscretion of mine."

"That's all I care about, sir," said Mrs. Dugget, piously, with her keen old eye upon the notes, "and being sure of that, I don't mind owning that I did take the trouble to follow up the address upon the envelope. Now, when a gentleman like Mr. Dalbrook—a gentleman as always pays his way regular, and stands high in his profession—when such a gentleman as that changes his name, you may be sure there's a lady in the case. If you take up a paper,

sir, and happen to glance at a divorce case, promiscuous, as I do sometimes when my son-in-law leaves his *Telegraph* or his *Echo* lying about—you'll find that the gentleman who runs away with the lady always changes his name first thing—whether he and the lady go to an hotel, or takes lodgings, or go on the Continent—he always takes another name. I don't think the change does him much good, for wherever he goes people seem to know all about him, and come out with their knowledge in court directly it's wanted—but it seems as if he must always act so, and act so he does."

Theodore submitted to this disquisition in silence, but he touched the notes lightly with his fingers and made them crackle, by way of stimulus to Mrs. Dugget's intellect.

"I felt sure if Mr. Dalbrook had been living at Myrtle Cottage under the name of Danvers there was a lady mixed up in it, and, being in the Long Vacation, when I knew he generally went abroad, I thought I would try and satisfy myself about him. I thought I should feel more comfortable in waiting upon him when I knew the worst. And then Camberwell Grove was such a little way off. It would be just a nice outing for me of a summer evening; so what did I do one lovely warm afternoon but take my tea a little earlier than usual, and trot off to the corner of Lancaster Place, where I wait for a Waterloo 'bus coming sauntering along the Strand as if time was made for slaves, and there was no such things as loop-lines or trains to be caught. I hadn't no train to catch, so I didn't mind the sauntering and the dawdling and the taking up and setting down. I had all the summer evening before me when I got out at the Green and made my way to the Grove. It's a beautiful romantic place, Camberwell Grove, sir. I don't know whether you know it, but if you do I'm sure you'll own that there ain't a prettier neighbourhood near London. Twenty years ago they used still to show you the garden where George Barnwell murdered his uncle, but I dare say that's been done away with by now. It took me a good time to find Myrtle Cottage, for it was one of the smallest houses in the Grove, and it stood back in a pretty little garden, and there was nothing on the gate to tell if it was Myrtle or otherwise. But I did find it at last, thanks to a young housemaid who was standing at the gate, talking to a grocer's lad. The grocer's lad made off when he saw me, and for the first few minutes the girl was inclined to be disagreeable; but she came round very quickly, and I dare say she was glad to have some one to talk to on that solitary summer evening. 'Cook's out for her holiday,' she says, 'and I can't stop in the house alone.' And then we got talking, and after we'd talked a bit standing at the gate, she asked me into the garden, where there was a long narrow grass plot, screened off from the high road by two horse-chestnut trees and some laburnums, and there was

some garden chairs and a table on the grass, and the young woman asked me to sit down. She'd got her work-basket out there, and she'd been making herself an apron. 'I can't bear the house of a summer evening,' she says, 'it gives me the horrors.' Well, we talked of her master and mistress, as was natural. She'd lived with them over a twelvemonth, and it was a pretty good place, but very dull, and the missus had a temper, and was dreadfully particular, and expected things as nice as if she had ten servants instead of two, and was very mean into the bargain, and seemed afraid of spending money. 'I shouldn't be so particular, if I was her,' the girl said, and then she told me that she knew things wasn't all right, though they seemed a very respectable couple, and the lady went to church regularly."

"What made her suspect that things were wrong?" asked Theodore, Mrs. Dugget having paused at this point of her narrative.

"Oh, sir, servants always know! They can't live six months in a house without finding out how the land lies. They've got so little to think of, you see, except their masters and mistresses. You can't wonder if they're always on the watch and the listen, meaning no harm, poor things. If you was shut up in a stuffy little kitchen all day, never seeing no one but the lads from the tradespeople for two or three minutes at a time, you'd watch and you'd listen. It's human nature. People don't like reading servants, and they don't like gadding servants; so they must put up with servants that think a good deal of what's going on round them. The housemaid told me she was sure from the solitary way Mr. and Mrs. Danvers lived that there was a screw loose somewhere. 'No one never comes near them,' she said, 'and she never goes nowhere except for a walk with him. No visitors, no friends. I can't think how she bears her life. She hasn't a party-gown, even. If anybody asked her to a party she couldn't go. When he took her abroad last month she was all in a fluster and excitement, just like a child, or like a prisoner that's going to be let out of prison. She shook hands with cook and me when she said good-bye, and that isn't like her. "I feel so happy, Jane," she says, "I don't know what I'm doing." No more I think she did. She looked quite wild with pleasure, and quite young too in her new bonnet, although in a general way she looks older than him.' And then the girl told me how fond she was of him, although she showed her temper now and then, even to him. Not often, the girl said, and any quarrel with him threw her into a dreadful way afterwards, and she would lie awake and sob all night long. The girl had heard her, for it was a trumpery little house, though it was pretty to look at, and the walls were very thin. I could see with my own eyes that it wasn't much of a house, a sort of dressed-up cottage, smothered with creepers up to the roof. It looked pretty and countrified after the Temple, and

I could understand that Mr. Dalbrook liked living in such a lovely place as Camberwell Grove."

"Did you find out what the lady was like?" asked Theodore.

"You may be sure I tried to do that, sir. How could I help being interested in a lady that had such an influence over one of my gentlemen? The girl told me that Mrs. Danvers was one of the 'has beens.' She had been handsome, perhaps, once upon a time; and she might have had a fine figure once upon a time; but she had neither face nor figure now. She was pale and careworn, and she was very thin. She didn't do anything to set herself off either, like other ladies of five and thirty. She wore the same merino gown month after month, and she had only one silk gown in her wardrobe. She was always neat and nice, like a lady; but she didn't seem to care much how she looked. She told the girl once that she and Mr. Danvers would be better off by and by, and then all things would be different with them. 'I am only waiting for those happier days,' she says; but the girl fancied she would be an old woman before those days came."

"Were there any children?"

"I could not find out for certain. The girl fancied from chance words she had overheard that there had been a baby, but that it had been sent away, and that this was a grievance between them, and came up when they quarrelled, which was not often, as I said before. Altogether I left Camberwell Grove feeling very sorry for the lady who was called Mrs. Danvers, and I thought it was a great pity if Mr. Dalbrook wanted to make a home for himself he couldn't have managed it better. I made great friends with Jane, the housemaid, before I left that garden, and I asked her when she had an evening out to come and take a cup of tea with me; and if she could get leave to go to the theatre, my youngest son, who was living at home then, could take her, along with my daughter, who was then unmarried and in service in New Bridge Street. The young woman came once, about Christmas time, and she told me things were just the same as they had been at Myrtle Cottage. She talked very freely about Mr. and Mrs. Danvers over her tea, but she had no idea that he was beknown to me, or that he was a barrister with chambers in the Temple. She thought he was something in the City. I asked her if it was Mr. Danvers who was mean and kept his lady short of money; but she thought not. She thought it was Mrs. Danvers that had a kind of mania for saving, for she was quite put out if Mr. Danvers brought her home a present that cost a few pounds. It seemed as if they were saving up for some purpose—for they used to talk to each other of the money he was putting by, and it was plain they were looking forward to a better house and a happier kind of life. Jane thought that either she had a husband hidden away somewhere—in a lunatic asylum, perhaps—or he had another wife."

Mrs. Dugget stopped to replenish the thrifty little fire with a very small scoopful of coals, during which operation the sleek black cat leaped upon her back and balanced himself upon her shoulders while she bent over the grate.

"Well, sir, that was Jane's first and last visit. She got married all of a sudden before Lady-day, and she went to live in the country, where her husband was postman in her native village, and I never see no more of her. I went to Camberwell Grove again in the Long Vacation, when I knew Mr. Dalbrook was away, but I found only an old woman in the house as caretaker, stone deaf, and disagreeable into the bargain. Mr. Dalbrook moved into King's Bench Walk the following year, and less than six months after that I saw his marriage in the papers; and his clerk told me he had married a very rich young lady, and was going to buy an estate in the country. I went to have another look at the cottage soon after Mr. Dalbrook's marriage, and I found the garden-gate locked, and a board up to say that the house was to be let unfurnished; and that, sir, is all I could ever find out about the lady called Mrs. Danvers."

"And this history of the home in Camberwell Grove is all you ever knew about Mr. James Dalbrook's life outside the chambers in Ferret Court."

"Yes, sir, that is all I ever heard, promiscuously or otherwise."

"Well, Mrs. Dugget, you have been frank with me, and you have earned my little present," said Theodore, handing her the two notes, which her old fingers touched tremulously in a rapture that was too much for words. It was with an effort that she faltered out her thanks for his generosity, which, she protested, she had never "looked for."

Theodore walked back towards the Temple deep in thought; indeed so troubled and perplexed were his thoughts that upon approaching Ferret Court he stopped short, and instead of going straight to his chambers, turned aside and went to the Gardens, where he walked up and down the same gravel path for an hour, pondering upon that picture of the hidden home in Camberwell Grove, conjured up before him by the loquacious laundress. Yes, he could imagine that obscure existence almost as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes. He could fancy the solitary home where never kinsman or familiar friend crossed the threshold; a home destitute of all home ties and homely associations; a home never smiled upon by the parson of the parish; cut off from all local interests, identified with nothing, a mystery among the commonplace dwellings around and about it; a subject for furtive observation from the neighbours. He could fancy those two lonely lives preying upon each other, too closely united for peaceful union; the woman

too utterly dependent upon the man; she feeling her dependence a degradation; he feeling her helplessness a burden. He could picture them, loving each other, perhaps, passionately, jealously to the last, and yet weary of each other, worn out and weighed down by the narrowness of a life walled off from the rest of the world and all its changeful interests and widening sympathies. And then he saw the picture in still darker colours, as it might have been ere that unknown figure faded from the canvas. He thought of the ambitious, successful barrister, heart-sick at the fetters which he had fastened upon his life, tired of his faded mistress, seeing all gates open to him were he but free to pass them; still living apart from the world, at a time of life when all the social instincts are at their highest development, when a man loves the society of his fellow-men, the friction of crowds, the sound of his own voice, and every social tribute that the world can offer to his talents and his success. He saw his kinsman galled by the chain which love and honour had hung about him, loathing his bondage, longing for liberty—saw him with the possibility of a brilliant marriage suddenly offering itself to him, a lovely girl ready to throw herself into his arms, a fortune at his feet, and the keen ambition of a self-made man goading him like a spur. How did it end? Did death set him free—death, the loosener of all bonds? Or did his mistress sacrifice herself and her broken heart to his welfare, and of her own accord release him? There are women capable of such sacrifices. It would seem that his disentanglement, however it came about, had been perfect of its kind; for no rumour of a youthful intrigue, no scandal about a cast-off mistress had ever clouded the married life of James Dalbrook. Even in Cheriton village, where the very smallest nucleus in the way of fact was apt to swell into a gigantic scandal, even at Cheriton nobody had ever hinted at indiscretions in the earlier years of the local magnate.

And then Theodore Dalbrook asked himself the essential question: What bearing, if any, had this episode of his kinsman's life upon the murder of Juanita's husband? What dark and vengeful figure lurked in the background of that common story of dishonourable love? An outraged husband, a brother, a father? That obscure life apart from friends and acquaintances would show that some great wrong had been done, some sacred tie had been broken. Only a sinful union so hides its furtive happiness—only a deep sense of degradation will reconcile a woman to banishment from the society of her own sex.

Whether that forsaken mistress were dead or living there might lurk in her sad history the elements of tragedy, the motive for a ghastly revenge; and on this account the story possessed a grim fascination for Theodore Dalbrook. He lay awake the greater part of the night thinking in a fitful way of that illicit ménage in the

unfashionable suburb—the suburb whose very existence is unknown to society. He fell asleep long after the sun was up, only to dream confusedly of a strange woman who was now James Dalbrook's lawful wife—and now his victim—and whose face had vague resemblances to other faces, and who was and was not half a dozen other women in succession.

He walked to Camberwell on the following afternoon, surprised at the strange world through which he passed on his way there, the teeming, busy, noisy world—the world which makes such a hard fight for life. The Grove itself, after that bustling, seething road, seemed a place in which nightingales might have warbled, and laughing girls hidden from their lovers in the summer dusk. The very atmosphere of decay from a better state was soothing. There were trees still, and gardens, and here and there pretty, old-fashioned houses; and in a long narrow garden between two larger houses he found Myrtle Cottage. There was a board up, and the neglected garden indicated that the cottage had been a long time without a tenant.

There was a policeman's wife living in it, with a colony of small children, in the cotton-pinafore stage of existence, and with noses dependent upon maternal supervision, so much so that scarcely had the matron attended to one small snub than her attention was called off to another, which gave a distracted air to all her conversation.

She took Mr. Dalbrook over the house, and expatiated upon the damp walls, and the utter incompetence of the cistern and pipes to meet the exigencies of a family, which was the more to be regretted on the ground that the landlord declined to do anything in the way of repairs, as he intended to pull the house down in a few years with a view to making better use of the ground.

"And indeed that's about all it's fit for," said the policeman's wife. "It ain't fit for anybody to *live* in."

The rooms had even a more desolate look than rooms in empty houses usually have, in consequence of this long neglect. The cottage had been empty for two years and a half, long enough for the damp to make hideous blotches upon all the walls, and trace discoloured maps of imaginary continents upon all the ceilings; long enough for the spiders to weave their webs in all the corners, for rust to eat deep into the iron grates, and for dust and dirt to obscure every window.

Theodore stood in the room which had once been a drawing-room, and which boasted of a wide French window looking out upon a lawn, with a large weeping-ash directly in front of the window, and much too near for airiness or health, a melancholy-looking tree in which Theodore thought Mrs. Danvers might have found a symbol of her own life, as she stood at the window and looked at those dull drooping branches against a background of ivy-covered wall.

CHAPTER XXII.

"And if we do but watch the hour,
There never yet was human power
Which could evade, if unforgiven,
The patient search and vigil long
Of him who treasures up a wrong."

THEODORE made a tour of the little garden in the summer sundown. It was very small, but its age gave it a superiority over most suburban gardens. There were trees, and hardy perennials that had been growing year after year, blooming and fading, with very little care on the part of successive tenants. The chief charm of the garden to some people might have been its seclusion. There was no possibility of being "overlooked" in this narrow pleasaunce, and overlooking is the curse of the average garden attached to the average villa. Mr. and Mrs. Jones, taking their ease, or working in their garden in the cool of the evening, are uncomfortably conscious of Mr. and Mrs. Smith eyeing them from the drawing-room windows of next door.

Here the high wall on one side, and the tall horse-chestnuts on the other, made a perfect solitude; but seclusion on a very small scale is apt to merge into dulness, and it must be owned that the garden of Myrtle Cottage at sundown was about as melancholy a place as the mind of man could imagine. Theodore, contemplating it from the standpoint of Mrs. Danvers' history, her friendlessness, her sense of degradation, wondered that she could have endured that dismal atmosphere for a single summer. And she had lived there for many years; lived there till weariness must have become loathing.

"God help her, poor soul!" he said to himself. "How she must have abhorred that weeping ash! How it must have tortured her to see the leaves go and come again year after year, and to know that neither spring nor autumn would better her fate!"

He took down the address of the agent who had the letting of the house, and left with the intention of seeing him that evening if possible. The landlord was a personage resembling the Mikado, or the Grand Llama, and was not supposed to be accessible to the human vision, certainly not in relation to his house property. The policeman's wife averred that "him and the De Crespignys owned half Camberwell."

The agent was represented to live over his office, which was in no less famous a locality than Camberwell Green, and was likely, therefore, to oblige Mr. Dalbrook by seeing him upon a business matter after business hours. It was not much past seven when Theodore entered the office, where he found the agent extending his business hours so far as to be still seated at his desk, deep in the revision of a catalogue. He was a very genial agent, and he put aside the catalogue immediately, asked Theodore to be seated, and wheeled round his office chair to talk to him.

"Myrtle Cottage. Yes, a charming little box, convenient and compact, a bijou residence for a bachelor with a small establishment. Such a nice garden, too, retired and rustic. If you were thinking of taking the property on a repairing lease, the rent would be very moderate, really a wonderfully advantageous occasion for any one wanting a pretty secluded place."

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Adkins, I am not thinking of taking that house or any house. I have come to ask you a few questions about a former tenant, and I shall take it as a favour if you will be so good as to answer them."

The agent looked disappointed, but he put his pen behind his ear, crossed his legs, and prepared himself for conversation.

"Do you mean a recent tenant?" he asked.

"No; the gentleman I am interested in left Myrtle Cottage twenty years ago—nearer five and twenty years, perhaps. His name was Danvers."

The agent gave a suppressed whistle, and looked at his interlocutor with increasing interest.

"Oh, you wanted to know something about Mr. Danvers. Was he an acquaintance of yours?"

"He was."

"Humph! He is more than old enough to be your father. He might almost be your grandfather. Do you know him intimately?"

"As intimately as a man of my age can know a man of his age."

"And position," added the agent, looking at his visitor shrewdly.

Theodore returned the look.

"I don't quite follow your meaning," he said.

"Come, now, sir, if you know anything at all about the gentleman in question you must know that his name is not Danvers, and never was Danvers; that he took Myrtle Cottage under an assumed name, and lived there for nearly ten years under that assumed name; that he never let any of his friends or acquaintances cross his threshold; and that he thought he had hoodwinked me, me a man of the world, moving about in the world, among other men of the world. Why, sir, Mr. Danvers had not paid me three half-years' rent in notes or gold, as he always paid, and in this office here—before I had found out that he was the rising barrister, Mr. Dalbrook

—and before I had guessed the reason of his hole-and-corner style of life."

"What became of the lady who was called Mrs. Danvers?"

"And who in all probability was Mrs. Danvers," said Mr. Adkins. "I have reason to believe that was her name. What became of her? God knows. A servant came to me one August morning with the keys and a half-year's rent—the tenant had given notice to surrender at the Michaelmas quarter, that being the quarter at which he entered upon possession. Mr. and Mrs. Danvers had gone abroad—to Belgium, the woman thought; and as it was their present intention to live abroad, their furniture had all been removed to the Pantechnicon upon the previous day, and the house was empty, and at my disposal."

"Did you hear nothing more of them after that?"

"I heard of him, sir, as all the world heard of him—heard of his marriage with a wealthy young Spanish lady, heard of his elevation to the peerage,—but of Mrs. Danvers I never heard a syllable. I take it she was pensioned off, and that she lived—and may have died—on the Continent. Why, there are a lot of sleepy old Flemish towns—I'm a bit of a traveller in my quiet way—which seem to have been created for that purpose!"

"Is that all you can tell me about your tenants, Mr. Adkins? I am not prompted by idle curiosity in my inquiries. I have a very strong motive——"

"Don't trouble yourself to explain, sir. I know nothing about Mr. and Mrs. Danvers which I have any desire to hold back—or which I am under any obligation to keep back. My business relations with the gentleman never went beyond letting him Myrtle Cottage, which I let to him without a reference, on the strength of a twelvemonth's rent in advance, and a deuce of a hurry he was in to get into the place. As for Mrs. Danvers, you may be surprised to hear that I never saw her face. I'm not a prying person, and, as the rent was never overdue, I had no occasion to call at the house. But I did see some one who had a strong bearing upon the lady's life, and a very troublesome customer that person was."

"Who was he?"

"No less an individual than her husband. A man dashed into this office one winter afternoon, a little after dusk, and asked me if I had let a house to a person called Danvers? I could see that he had been drinking, and that he was in a state of strong excitement; so I answered him shortly enough, and I kept him well between myself and the door, so as to be able to pitch him out if he got troublesome. He told me that he'd just come from Myrtle Cottage, that he had been refused admittance there, although the woman who lived there was his wife. He wanted to know if the house had been taken by her, or by the scoundrel who passed himself off as

her husband? If it had been taken in her name it was his house, and he would very soon let them know that he had the right to be there. I told him that I knew nothing about him or his rights; that my client's tenant was Mr. Danvers, and that there the business ended. He was very violent upon this, abused the tenant, talked about his own wrongs and his wife's desertion of him, asked me if I knew that this man who called himself Danvers was an impostor who had taken the house in a false name, and who was really a beggarly barrister called Dalbrook; and then from blasphemy and threatening he fell to crying, and sat in my office shivering and whimpering like a half-demented creature, till I took compassion upon him so far as to give him a glass of brandy, and send my office lad out with him to put him into a cab."

"Did he tell you his name or profession?"

"No, he was uncommonly close about himself. I asked him if the lady's name was really Danvers, and if he was Mr. Danvers; but he only stared at me in a vacant way with his drunken eyes. It was hopeless trying to get a straight answer from him about anything. Heaven knows how he got home that night, for he wouldn't tell the office boy his address, and only told the cabman to drive to Holborn. 'I'll pull him up when I get there,' he said. He may have been driven about half the night, for all I can tell."

"Was that all you ever saw or heard of him?"

"All I ever saw, but not all I ever heard. Servants and neighbours will talk, you see, sir, and I happened to be told of three or four occasions—at considerable intervals—at which my gentleman made unpleasantness at Myrtle Cottage. He would go there wild with drink—I believe he never went when he was sober—and would kick up a row. If he wanted to get his wife away from the life she was leading he would have gone to work in a different manner; but it's my opinion he wanted nothing of the kind. He was savage and vindictive in his cups, and he wanted to frighten her and to annoy the man who had tempted her away from him. But he was a poor creature, and after blustering and threatening he would allow himself to be thrust out of doors like a stray cur."

"What kind of a man did he look? A broken-down gentleman?"

"Yes, I should say he had been a gentleman once, but he had come down a longish way. He had come down as low as drink and dissipation can bring a man. Altogether I should consider him a dangerous customer."

"A man capable of violence—of crime even?"

"Perhaps! A man who wouldn't have stopped at crime if he hadn't been a white-livered hound. I tell you, sir, the fellow was afraid of Mr. Dalbrook, although Mr. Dalbrook ought to have been afraid of him. He was a craven to the core of his heart."

"What age did you give him?"

"At the time he came to me I should put him down at about six and thirty."

"And that is how many years ago?"

"Say four and twenty—I can't be certain to a year or so. It wasn't a business transaction, and I haven't any record of the fact."

"Was he a powerful-looking man?"

"He was the remains of a powerful man: he must have been a fine man when he was ten years younger—a handsome man, too—one of those fair-complexioned, blue-eyed, aquiline-nosed men who set off good clothes—the kind of man to do justice to a rig out from a fashionable tailor. He was a wreck when I saw him, but he was the wreck of a handsome man."

"And you take it that he was particularly vindictive?"

"He was as vindictive as a cur can be."

"And was his anger strongest against the lady, do you suppose, or against the gentleman?"

"Decidedly against the gentleman. He was full of envy and hatred and all uncharitableness towards Mr. Dalbrook. He affected to think contemptuously of his talents and to belittle him in every way, while he was bursting with envy at his growing success. He was jealous and angry as a husband, no doubt; but he was still more jealous and still angrier as a disappointed man against a successful man. He was as venomous as conscious failure can be. And now, sir, that I have spoken so freely about this little domestic drama, which was all past and done with twenty years ago, and in which I only felt interested as a man of the world, now may I ask your name, and how you come to be so keenly interested in so remote an event?"

"My name is Dalbrook," replied Theodore, taking out his card and lying it upon the agent's desk.

"You don't mean to say so! A relation of Lord Cheriton's?"

"His cousin, a distant cousin, but warmly attached to him and—his. The motive of my inquiry need be no secret. A dastardly murder was committed last summer in Lord Cheriton's house——"

"Yes, I remember the circumstances."

"A seemingly motiveless murder; unless it was the act of some secret foe—foe either of the man who was killed—or of his wife's father, Lord Cheriton. I have reason to know that the young man who was killed had never made an enemy. His life was short and blameless. Now, a malignant cur, such as the man you describe—a man possessed by the devil of drink—would be just the kind of creature to assail the strong man through his defenceless daughter. To murder her husband was to break her heart, and to crush her father's hopes. This man may have discovered long beforehand how my cousin had built upon that marriage—how devoted he was to his daughter, and how ambitious for her. Upon my soul, I believe

that you have given me the clue. If we are to look for a blind unreasoning hatred—malignity strong enough and irrational enough to strike the innocent in order to get at the guilty—I do not think we can look for it in a more likely person than in the husband of Mrs. Danvers."

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Adkins, keenly interested, yet dubious. "But, granted that he is the man, how are you to find him? It is about four and twenty years since he stood where you are standing now, and I have never set eyes on him from that day to this—close upon a quarter of a century. I can't tell you his calling, or his kindred, the place where he lived, or even the name he bore, with any certainty. Danvers may have been only an assumed name—or it may have been his name. There's no knowing—or rather there's only one person likely to be able to help you in the matter, and that is Lord Cheriton."

"It would be difficult to question him upon such a subject."

"Of course it would; and I don't suppose that even he has taken the trouble to keep himself posted in the movements of that very ugly customer. Having shunted the lady he wouldn't be likely to concern himself about the gentleman."

"A quarter of a century," said Theodore, too thoughtful to give a direct answer. "Yes, it must be very difficult to trace any man after such an interval; but if that man went to Cheriton Chase he must have left some kind of trail behind him, and it will go hard with me if I don't get upon that trail. I thank you, Mr. Adkins, for the most valuable information I have obtained yet, and if any good comes of it you shall know. Good night."

"Good night, sir. I shall be very glad to aid in the cause of justice. Yes, I remember the Cheriton Chase murder, and I should like to see the mystery cleared up."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Upon a tone,
A touch of hers, his blood would ebb and flow,
And his cheek change tempestuously . . .
But she in these fond feelings had no share;
Her sighs were not for him; to her he was
Even as a brother—but no more."

After that conversation with the house-agent, the idea that he had found the clue to the Cheriton Chase mystery took root in Theodore Dalbrook's mind. Taking as his starting-point the notion of a deadly hatred wreaking itself in an indirect revenge, there seemed no more likely figure for the *rôle* of avenger than that of the wronged and deserted husband. The one startling improbability in this view of the case was the long interval between the husband's appearance at Myrtle Cottage and the date of the murder; but even this difficulty Theodore was able to account for upon the hypothesis of a gradual perversion, a descent from vice to crime, as the man's nature hardened under the corrupting influence of a profligate life, while the old festering sore grew into a malignant canker, under the lash of misery. He had seen in that great seething cauldron of London life men whose countenances bore the stamp of a degradation so profound that the most ferocious crime might seem the normal outcome of their perverted natures. He could imagine how the broken-down gentleman, steeped in drink, and embittered by the idea of wrongs which had been the natural consequence of his own misconduct, had sunk step by step upon the ladder of vice, till he had arrived at that lowest deep where the dreams of men are stained with blood and darkened by the shadow of the hangman. He could imagine such a man brooding over his wrongs for long years, nursing his jealous wrath as the one touch of manliness that survived in him—until some newspaper description of the Dalbrook and Carmichael wedding reminded him of the bitter contrast between his own lot and that of his rival, and, lashed into sudden fury, he set out upon his murderous errand, hardly caring whom he murdered so long as he could hurt the man he hated.

The very fact that Mrs. Danvers' husband had been described as a craven, made the idea of his guilt more likely. Only a coward would have chosen such a revenge; only a coward could have stretched out his hand from the darkness to kill a man who had

never injured him. The crime was the crime of a coward or a madman; and this man, brutalized by drink, may have been both madman and coward.

Here at least was a man closely associated with James Dalbrook's life, and having good cause to hate him. In the darkness surrounding the murder of Godfrey Carmichael this was the first flash of light.

And having arrived at this point Theodore Dalbrook saw himself face to face with a new and seemingly insurmountable difficulty. To follow this clue to the end, to bring the crime home to the husband of Lord Cheriton's cast-off mistress, was to expose the history of the great man's earlier years to the world at large, to offer up a reputation which had hitherto been stainless as a rich and savoury repast to that carrion brood—consisting of almost everybody—which loves to feast upon garbage. How the evening newspapers would revel in the details of such a story—what denunciations—what gloating over the weakness of a strong man's life! How the contents bills would bristle with appetizing headings, how the shrill-voiced newsboys would yell their startling particulars, their latest developments of the Cheriton Chase Scandal!

This must all inevitably follow upon the discovery of the murderer, if the murderer were indeed the injured husband. There could be no possible escape from that glare of publicity, that swelling symphony of slander. From the moment the law laid its hand upon the criminal the case would pass beyond individual control, and individual interests and reputations would become as nought. Justice would have to do its work, and in the doing of it must needs afford the usual fine opportunity to the newspapers. Theodore thought with horror of such humiliation coming upon Lord Cheriton, and through him upon Juanita, who loved her father with a reverential affection, and who was intensely proud of his character and position. He thought of gentle Lady Cheriton, who adored her husband, and who doubtless would be made miserable by the knowledge that his first love had been given to another woman, whom he had loved well enough to sacrifice honour for the sake of that illicit love. What agony to that single-minded, trusting creature to find that dark spot upon her husband's past, and to know that the daughter's happiness had been blighted because of the father's sin!

With these considerations in his mind it seemed to Theodore that it would be better to halt on the very threshold of discovery; and yet there was the appalling thought of further possibilities in the way of crime—of a madman's revenge carried a stage further, a madman's pistol aimed at the defenceless mother or the unconscious child. What was he to do? Was there no alternative between inaction and such action as must speedily set in motion the

machinery of the law, and thus deprive him of all free will in the future conduct of the case?

Yes, there was an alternative course. If he were once assured of the identity of the assassin, it might be in his power to lay hands upon him, and to place him under such circumstances of control in the future as would insure Juanita's safety, and render any further crime impossible. If the man were mad, as Theodore thought more than likely, he might be quietly got into an asylum. If he were still master of his actions he might be got abroad, to the remotest colony in the Antipodes. The knowledge of his crime would be a hold over him, a lever which would remove him to the uttermost ends of the earth, if need were. This would be an illegal compromise, no doubt—unjustifiable in the eye of the law,—but if it insured Juanita's safety, and saved her father's character, the compromise was worth making. It was, indeed, the only way by which her security and her father's good name could be provided for.

To arrive at this result he had to find the man who appeared in Mr. Adkins's office about four and twenty years ago, and of whose subsequent existence he, Theodore, had no knowledge.

"I must begin at the other end," he told himself. "If that man was the murderer, he must have been seen in the neighbourhood. It is not possible that he could have come to the place, and watched for his opportunity, and got clear off after the deed was done without being seen by human eyes."

And yet there remained the fact that the local policeman and a London detective had both failed in obtaining the faintest trace of a suspicious-looking stranger, or indeed of any stranger, male or female, who had been observed in the neighbourhood of Cheriton before or after the murder; there remained the fact that a large reward had been offered without resulting in one scrap of information bearing upon the subject. How could he hope, in the face of these facts, to trace the movements of a man whose personal appearance was unknown to him, and who had come and gone like a shadow?

"I can but try, and I can but fail," he told himself. "Knowing what I know now, I cannot remain inactive."

It may be that he had caught something of the fiery eagerness which consumed Juanita, that in his ardent desire to be worthy of her regard, to waste his life in her service, he had become, as it were, inoculated with the spirit of his mistress, and hoped as she hoped, and thought as she thought.

With the beginning of the Long Vacation he went to Dorchester, but this time not alone. He took his friend Cuthbert Ramsay with him, as a visitor to the grave old house, in the grave old town.

His sisters often made a complaint against him that he never introduced any of his college friends to them—that whereas the sisters of other University men were rich in the acquaintance of Charlies and Algernons, and Freds and Toms, who were produceable at tennis parties and available for picnics at the shortest notice, they were restricted to the youths of Dorchester and a horizon bounded by the country houses of the immediate neighbourhood. Remembering these reproaches, and seeing that his friend Ramsay was obviously pining for rest and country air, Theodore suggested that he should occupy the bachelor's room in Cornhill as long as he could venture to stop away from hospitals and lectures and scientific investigations.

"You want a long fallow, Cuthbert," he said, "and you couldn't have a better lotus island than Dorchester. There's not an excitement or a feverish sensation to be had within twenty miles, and then I really want to make you known to my cousin, Lord Cheriton. He is a very clever man—an all-round man—and he would be interested in you and all that you are doing."

"I shall be proud of knowing him. And then there is your cousin, Lady Carmichael. I am deeply interested in her, without having ever seen her face, and when I do see her——"

"You will say she is one of the loveliest women you ever saw in your life, Cuthbert. I have no doubt of that. You will see her beauty under a cloud, for she is not one of those women who begin to get over the loss of a husband as soon as their crape gets rusty; but her beauty is all the more touching on account of the grief that separates her from all other women—even from her past self. I sometimes look at her and wonder if this sad and silent woman can be the Juanita I once knew; the light-hearted, spontaneous girl, a buoyant creature, all impulse and caprice, fancy and imagination."

"You may be sure that I shall admire her, and you may be sure I shall not forget that there is some one whose admiration has a deeper root than the lust of the eye and the fancy of the moment."

Theodore would not affect to misunderstand him. It was not possible that he could have talked of his cousin in the freedom of friendship without having revealed his secret to his friend.

"My dear fellow," he said with a sigh, "mine is a hopeless case. You will know that it is so when you see Juanita and me together. Her mother said to me on the first day of this year, 'If ever she comes to care for anybody it will be some new person;' and I have not the least doubt that her mother was right. Her first love was her playfellow, the companion of her girlhood. A woman cannot have two such loves. Her second attachment, if she ever make one, will be of a totally different character."

"Who knows, Theodore? A woman's heart is to be measured by no callipers that I know of; it is subject to no scientific test; we cannot say it shall give this or that result. It may remain cold as marble to a man through years of faithful devotion, and then, in an instant, the marble may change to a volcano, and hidden fires may leap out of that seeming coldness. 'Nil desperandum' should be the motto of all inventors—and of all lovers."

Dorchester, and especially the old house in Cornhill, received Mr. Ramsay with open arms. Harrington was in the dejected state of a young man who has been rudely awakened from youth's sweetest delusion. Fooled and forsaken by Juliet Baldwin, he had told himself that all women are liars, and was doing all in his power to establish his reputation as a woman-hater. In this temper of mind he was not averse from his own sex, and he welcomed his brother's friend with unaffected cordiality, and was evidently cheered by the new life which Ramsay's vivacity brought into the quiet atmosphere of home.

The sisters were delighted to do honour to a scientific man, and were surprised, on attacking Mr. Ramsay at dinner with the ease and aplomb of *confrères* in modern science, to discover one of two things—either that he knew nothing, or that they knew very little. They were at first inclined to the former opinion, but it gradually dawned upon them that their own much-valued learning was of a very elementary character, and that their facts were for the most part wrong. Chastened by this discovery, they allowed the conversation to drift into lighter channels, and never again tackled Mr. Ramsay either upon the broad and open subject of evolution, or the burning question of the cholera bacillus. They were even content to leave him to the enjoyment of his own views upon spontaneous generation and the movement of glaciers, instead of setting him right upon both subjects, as they had intended in the beginning of their acquaintance.

"He is remarkably handsome, but horribly dogmatic," Sophia told her brother, "and I'm afraid he belongs to the showy, shallow school which has arisen since the death of Darwin. He would hardly have dared to talk as he did at dinner during Darwin's lifetime."

"Perhaps not, if Darwin had been omnipresent."

"Oh, there is a restraining influence in the very existence of such a man. He is a perpetual court of appeal against arrogant smatterers."

"I don't think you can call a man who took a first class in science a smatterer, Sophy. However, I'm sorry you don't like my friend."

"I like him well enough, but I am not imposed upon by his dogmatism."

The two young men drove to Milbrook Priory on the following

day, Theodore feeling painfully eager to discover what change the last few months had made in Juanita. She had been in Switzerland, with Lady Jane and the baby, living first at Grindelwald, and later in one of those little villages on the shores of the lake of the forest cantons, which combine the picturesque and the dull in a remarkable degree—a mere cluster of chalets and cottages at the foot of the Rigi, facing the monotonous beauty of the lake, and the calm grandeur of snow-capped mountains, which shut in that tranquil corner of the earth and shut out all the busy world beyond it. Nowhere else had Juanita felt that deep sense of seclusion, that feeling of being remote from the din and press of life.

And now she was again at the Priory. She had settled down there in her new position, as widow and mother, a woman for whom all life's passionate story was over, who must live henceforward for that new life growing day by day towards that distant age of passion and of sorrow through which she had passed suddenly and briefly, crowding into a month the emotions of a lifetime. There are women who have lived to celebrate their golden wedding who in fifty years of wedlock have not felt half her sum of love, and who in losing the companion of half a century have not felt half her sum of grief. It is the capacity for loving and suffering which differs in different people, and, weighed against that, Time counts but little.

She received her cousin with all her old friendliness. She was a little more cheerful than when last they met, and he saw that the new interest of her life had done good. Lady Jane was at Swanage, and Juanita was alone at the Priory, though not without the expectation of company a little later in the year, as the sisters and their husbands were to be with her before the first of October, so that the expense of pheasant-breeding might not be altogether wasted.

"You must be here as much as you can in October, Theodore," she said, "and help me to endure Mr. Grenville and Mr. Morningside. One talks nothing but sport, and the other insists upon teaching me the science of politics."

She received Cuthbert Ramsay with a serious sweetness which charmed him. Yes, she was verily beautiful among women, exceptionally beautiful. Those southern eyes shone star-like in the settled pallor of her face, and her whole countenance was etherealized by thought and grief. It touched the stranger to see how she struggled to put away the memory of her sorrow and to receive him with all due hospitality—how she restrained herself as she showed him the things that had been a part of her dead husband's existence, and told him the story of the old house which had sheltered so many generations of Carmichaels.

Lady Cheriton had been lunching at the Priory, where she came

at least twice a week to watch her grandson's development in all those graces of mind and person which marked his superiority to the average baby. She came all the oftener because of the difficulty in getting Juanita to Cheriton.

"My poor child will hardly ever visit us," she told Theodore, as they sauntered on the lawn while Juanita was showing Mr. Ramsay the pictures in the dining-room. "She has an insurmountable horror of the house she was once so fond of; and I can't wonder at it, and I can't be angry with her. I have seen how painfully her old home affects her, so I don't worry her to come to us often. I make a point of getting her there once in a way in the hope of overcoming her horror of the place as time goes by; and I have even gone out of my way to make changes in the furniture and decorations, so that the rooms should not look exactly the same as they looked in her fatal honeymoon; but I can see in her face that every corner of the house is haunted for her. Once when she had been calm and cheerful with me for a whole afternoon, walking about the garden and going from room to room, she flung herself into my arms suddenly, sobbing passionately. 'We were so happy, mother,' she said, 'so happy in this fatal house!' We must bear with her, poor girl. God has given her a dark lot."

Theodore had seen an anxious, questioning look in Juanita's eyes from the beginning of his visit, and he took the first opportunity of being alone with her, while Lady Cheriton entertained Mr. Ramsay with an exposition of the merits of her grandson, who was calmly slumbering in a hammock on the lawn, unconscious of her praises, and half smothered in embroidered coverlets.

"Have you found out anything?" she asked, eagerly, as soon as they were out of ear-shot.

"Yes, I believe I have really come upon a clue, and that I may ultimately discover the murderer; but I can give you no details as yet—the whole thing is too vague."

"How clever of you to succeed where the police have utterly failed! Oh, Theodore, you cannot imagine how I shall value you—how deeply grateful——"

"Stop, Juanita, for Heaven's sake don't praise me. I may be chasing a Will-o'-the-Wisp. I don't suppose that any experienced detective would take up such a clue as I am going to follow—only you have set me to do this thing, and it has become the business of my life to obey you."

"You are all that is good. Pray tell me everything you have discovered—however vague your ideas may be."

"No, Juanita, I can tell you nothing yet. You must trust me, dear. I am at best only on the threshold of a discovery. It may be long before I advance another step. Be content to know that I am not idle."

She gave an impatient sigh.

"It is so hard to be kept in the dark," she said. "I dream night after night that I myself am on the track of his murderer—sometimes that I meet him face to face—oh, the hideous pallid face—the face of a man who has been hanged and brought to life again. It is always the same kind of face—the same dull livid hue—though it differs as to features, though the man is never the same. You cannot imagine the agony of those dreams, Theodore. Lay that ghost for me, if you can. Make my life peaceful, though it can never be happy."

"Never is a long word, Nita. As the years go by, your child's love will give life a new colour."

"Yes, he is very dear. He has crept into my heart, little nestling unconscious thing—knowing nothing of my love or my sorrow, and yet seeming to comfort me. I sometimes think my darling's spirit looks out of those clear eyes. They seem so full of thought—of thought far beyond human wisdom."

Theodore could see that the work of healing was being done, slowly but surely. The gracious influence of a new love was being exercised, and the frozen heart was reviving to life and warmth under the soft touch of those baby fingers. He saw his cousin smile with something of the old brightness as she stood by while Cuthbert Ramsay dandled the little lord of Carmichael Priory in his great strong arms, smiling down at the tiny pink face peeping out of a cloud of lace and muslin.

"Any one can see that Mr. Ramsay is fond of children," said Lady Cheriton, approvingly, as if a liking for infants just short-coated were the noblest virtue of manhood.

"Oh, I am fond enough of the little beggars," answered Cuthbert, lightly. "All the gutter brats about St. Thomas's know me, and hang on to my coat-tails as I go by. I like to look at a child's face—those old shrewd London faces especially—and speculate upon the life that lies before those younglings, the things those eyes are to see, the words those lips are to speak. Life is such a tremendous mystery, don't you know—one can never be tired of wondering about it. But this fellow is going to be very happy, and a great man in the land. He is going to belong to the new order, the order of rich who go through life shoulder to shoulder with the poor; the redressers of wrongs, the adjusters of social levels."

"I hope you are not a Socialist, Mr. Ramsay?" said Lady Cheriton, with an alarmed air.

"Not much; but I acknowledge that there are points where my ideas touch the boundary line of Socialism. I don't want impossibilities. I have no dream of a day when there shall be no more millionaires, no great patrons of art or great employers of labour, but only a dead level of small means and shabby dwellings, and

sordid colourless lives. No, there must be butterflies as well as ants—if it were only that the ants may have something pretty to look at. What I should like to see is a stronger bond of friendship and sympathy between the two classes—a real knowledge and understanding of each other between rich and poor, and the twin demons Patronage and Sycophancy exorcised for ever and ever."

The tea-tables were brought out upon the lawn by this time; Sir Godfrey Carmichael was carried off by his nurse; and the two young men sat down with Lady Cheriton and her daughter under the tree beneath which Juanita and her husband had sat on that one blissful day which they had spent together at the Priory as man and wife. They seemed a very cheery and pleasant quartette as they sat in the sultry afternoon atmosphere, with the level lawn and flower-beds stretching before them, and the wide belt of old timber shutting out all the world beyond. Cuthbert Ramsay was the chief talker, full of animal spirits, launching the wildest paradoxes, the most unorthodox opinions. The very sound of his strong full voice, the very ring of his buoyant laugh, were enough to banish gloomy thoughts and sad memories.

Lady Cheriton was delighted with this new acquaintance; first, because he was dexterous in handling a baby; next on the score of general merits. She was not a deeply read person, but she had a profound respect for culture in other people; and she had an idea that a scientific man was a creature apart, belonging to a loftier world than that which she and her intellectual equals inhabited. Theodore had told her of his friend's claims to distinction, his hard work in several cities, and seeing this earnest worker boyish and light-hearted, interested in the most frivolous subjects, she was lost in wonder at his condescension.

She begged him to go to Cheriton with Theodore at the earliest opportunity—an invitation which he accepted gladly.

"I have long wished to know Lord Cheriton," he said.

The two young men left soon after tea. Cuthbert's high spirits deserted him at the Priory gates, and both men were thoughtful during the homeward drive.

"Well, Cuthbert, what do you think of my cousin, now that you have seen her?" Theodore asked, when he had driven the first mile.

"I can only agree with you, my dear fellow. She is a very lovely woman. I think there could hardly be two opinions upon that point."

"And do you think—as I do—that it is hopeless for any man to spend his life in worshipping her? Do you think her heart is buried with her dead husband?"

"Only as Proserpine was buried with Pluto. It is not in human

nature for so young a woman to wear her weeds for a lifetime. The hour of revival must come sooner or later. She has too bright and quick an intellect to submit to the monotony of an inconsolable sorrow. Her energy expends itself now in the desire to avenge her husband's death. Failing in that, her restless spirit will seek some new outlet. She is beginning to be interested in her child. As that interest grows with the child's growth, her horizon will widen. And then, and then, when she has discovered that life can still be beautiful, her heart will become accessible to a new love. The cure and the change, the awakening from death to life, may be slower than it is in most such cases, because this woman is the essence of sincerity, and all her feelings lie deep. But the awakening will come—you may be sure of that. Wait for it, Theodore; possess your soul in patience."

"You can afford to be philosophical," said the other, with a sigh. "You are not in love!"

"True, my friend. No doubt that makes a difference."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"And one, an English home—gray twilight poured
On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
Softer than sleep—all things in order stored,
A haunt of ancient Peace."

THEODORE and his friend betook themselves to Cheriton Chase on the following Friday, for that kind of visit which north country people describe as "a week end." They carried their portmanteaux in that portion of the dog-cart which is more legitimately occupied by a leash of spaniels or Irish setters, and they arrived in the golden light of the afternoon, just when that sunk lane approaching the west gate was looking its loveliest. Hart's-tongue and rocky boulder, the great brown trunks of the oaks and the polypodium growing amidst their cloven branches were all touched with sun-gleams, while evening shadows lay soft and cool upon the tall flowering grasses in the meadows on either side of the deep gully.

"That is Mrs. Porter's cottage," said Theodore, indicating the gatekeeper's house with a turn of his whip towards the end of the lane where the clustered chimneys showed through a gap in the trees.

Ramsay had been introduced to Miss Newton, and had constituted

himself honorary surgeon and medical adviser to that lady and all her humble friends. He had been invited to the tea-parties in Wedgewood Street, and had interested himself in the young woman called Marian, and in her probable identity with the lodge-keeper's missing daughter, for which reason he had a keen desire to make the lodge-keeper's acquaintance.

"From your account of the lady she must be a piece of human adamant," he said. "I like to tackle that kind of individual. I've met a few of them, and I'm happy to say that if I haven't been able to melt them I've generally succeeded in making them smart. I should enjoy exhibiting my moral aquafortis in the case of this lady. I shall get you to accompany me in a morning call upon her while we are at Cheriton."

"My dear Cuthbert, I would sooner call, uninvited and without credentials, upon the Archbishop of Canterbury. I don't forget how she froze me when I tried to be friendly with her last New Year's Day. She was more biting than the north-east wind that was curdling the ponds in the Park."

"A fig for her bitingness. Do you suppose I mind? If you won't take me to her, I shall go by myself. A character of that kind has an irresistible fascination for me. I would go a hundred miles any day to see a bitter, bad woman."

"She is bitter enough, but she may not be bad. She may be only a creature who mistakes fanaticism for religion, who has so misread her Bible that she thinks it her bounden duty to shut her heart against a beloved child rather than to forgive a sinner. I believe she is to be pitied rather than blamed, odious as she may seem."

"Very likely. A hard heart, or an obstinate temper, is a disease like other diseases. One ought to be sorry for the sufferer. But this woman has a strong character, anyhow, for good or evil, and I delight in studying character. The average man and woman is so colourless that there is infinite relief in the study of any temperament which touches the extreme. Think how delightful it would be to meet such a man as Iago or Othello—picture to yourself the pleasure of watching the gradual unfolding of such a mind as Iachimo's, and consider how keen would be one's interest in getting to the bottom of a woman like that poisoning stepmother of Imogen's whose name Shakespeare does not take the trouble to record. So this is the lodge—charming Early English cottage—real rustic English, not Bedford Parkish—half-timbered, thatched gables, dormers like eyes under bushy eyebrows, walls four feet thick, lattices two hundred years old. It might be the very cottage in which Grandmamma Wolf waited for the dear, plump little girl, with chubby cheeks shining like the butter in her basket, and with lips as sweet as her honey. Poor little girl!"

The servant-maid ran down the steps to open the gate, and as the wheels stopped an upper casement swung suddenly open, and a woman's face appeared in the golden light—a pale, wan face, whose most noticeable expression was a look of infinite weariness—

"Anæmic," said Cuthbert, as they drove in at the gate. "Decidedly anæmic. I should suspect that woman——"

"Of what?"

"Of being a vegetarian," answered Cuthbert, gravely. "But I'll call to-morrow, and find out all about her."

Lord Cheriton received his kinsman's friend with marked cordiality, and seemed to enjoy his freshness and spontaneity. They talked of Cambridge—the Cambridge of forty years ago and the Cambridge of to-day,—and they talked of the continental schools of medicine, a subject in which the lawyer was warmly interested. There were no other visitors expected before September, when three old friends of Lord Cheriton's were to shoot the partridges. In October there was to be a large party for the pheasant shooting, which was the chief glory of Cheriton Chase. There had been no shooters at the Chase last year, and Lord Cheriton felt himself so much the more constrained to hospitality.

"You fellows must come in October, when we have our big shoot," he said; but Cuthbert Ramsay told him that he must be at work again in London before the end of September.

Cuthbert was much impressed by the master of Cheriton Chase, and the grave and quiet dignity with which he wore success that might have made a weaker man arrogant and self-assertive. It would seem as if scarcely anything were wanting to that prosperous career. Yet Cuthbert saw that his host was not free from a cloud of care. It was natural, perhaps, that he should feel the tragedy of his son-in-law's death as a lasting trouble, not to be shuffled off and forgotten when the conventional period of mourning was past.

Theodore had some private talk with his cousin on the first evening of his visit, walking up and down the terrace, while Cuthbert was looking at the books in the library, under Lady Cheriton's guidance. He had it fully in his mind that the time must come when he would be obliged to take Lord Cheriton into his confidence, but he felt that time was still far off. Whenever the revelation came it must needs be infinitely painful to both, and deeply humiliating to the man whose hidden sin had brought desolation upon his innocent daughter, and untimely death upon the man whose fate had been linked with hers. It was for his dishonour, for the wrongs inflicted by him, that those two had made expiation.

No, the time to be outspoken—the time to say in the words of the prophet, "Thou art the man," had not yet come. When it should

come he would be prepared to act resolutely and fearlessly; but in the mean time he must needs go on working in the dark.

He remembered his last conversation with Lord Cheriton on that subject—remembered how Cheriton had said that he believed Godfrey Carmichael incapable of a dishonourable action—incapable of having behaved cruelly to any woman. Had he who pronounced that judgment been guilty of dishonour—had he been cruel to the woman who sacrificed herself for him? There are so many degrees in such wrong-doing! There is the sin of impulse: there is the deliberate betrayal, the coldly planned iniquity, the sin of the practised seducer who has reduced seduction to a science, and who has no more heart or conscience than a machine. There is the sin of the generous man, who finds his feet caught in the web of circumstance, who begins, innocently enough, by pitying a neglected wife, and ends by betraying the neglectful husband. Theodore gave his kinsman credit for belonging to the category of generous sinners. Indeed, the fact that he had lived aloof from the world for many years, sharing the isolation of the woman who loved him, was in itself evidence that he had not acted as a villain; yet it was possible that when the final hour came, the hour for breaking those illicit bonds, the rupture may have been in somewise cruel; and the remembrance of that cruelty might be a burden upon the sinner's conscience at this day. Such partings can never be without cruelty. The fact that one sinner is to marry and begin a new life, while the other sinner is to finish her days in a dishonoured widowhood, is in itself a cruelty. She may submit, as to a fate which she foresaw dimly, even in the hour of her fall—but she would be more than human if she did not think herself hardly used by the man who forsakes her. Nothing he can do to secure her worldly comfort or to screen her from the world's disdain will take the sting out of that parting. The one fact remains that her day is done. He has ceased to care for her, and he has begun to care for another.

"Nothing has occurred since I was here to throw any new light upon the murder, I suppose?" Theodore said quietly, as they smoked their cigars, walking slowly up and down in the summer night.

"Nothing."

"Did her ladyship tell you that I have met a girl in London, whom I believe to be no other than Mercy Porter?"

"Yes, she told me something about that fancy of yours, for I take it to be nothing more than a fancy. The world is too wide for you and Mercy Porter to meet so easily. What was your ground for identifying her with the lodge-keeper's girl?"

"The lodge-keeper's girl!" There was something needlessly contemptuous in the phrase, it seemed to Theodore: a studied disdain.

"It was she herself who suggested the idea, by her inquiries about Cheriton. She confessed to having come from this part of the world, and she has an air of refinement which shows that she does not belong to the peasant class. She is a very good pianiste—plays with remarkable taste and feeling; and Lady Cheriton tells me that Mercy had a talent for music. I have no doubt in my own mind that this young woman is Mercy Porter, and I think her mother ought to go to London and see her, even if she should not think fit to bring her back to the home she left."

"Mrs. Porter is a woman of peculiar temper. The girl may be happier away from her."

"Yes, that is very likely—but the mother ought to forgive her. The penitent sinner, whose life for the last few years has been blameless, ought to feel that she is pardoned and at peace with her mother. I tried to approach the subject, but Mrs. Porter repelled me with an almost vindictive air; and I do not think it would be any good for me to plead for my poor friend again. If you or Lady Cheriton would talk to her——"

"I will get my wife to manage her. It is a matter in which a woman would have more influence than you or I. In the mean time, if there is anything I can do to make Mercy Porter's life easier, I shall be very glad to do it, for her father's sake."

"You are very good; but she is not in want, and she seems content with her lot."

"What is she doing for a living?"

"Her employment is fine needlework. She lives in one small back room in Lambeth, and has only one friend in the world, and that friend happens to be a lady who once lived in this house."

"A lady who lived in this house!" exclaimed Lord Cheriton. "Who, in Heaven's name, do you mean?"

"Miss Newton, who was governess to Miss Strangway nearly forty years ago."

"What brought Miss Newton and you together?"

"That is rather a long story. I took some trouble to find the lady in order to settle one question which had disturbed my cousin Juanita since her husband's death."

"What question?"

"She was haunted by an idea that Sir Godfrey's murderer was one of the Strangways, and his murder an act of vengeance by some member of that banished race. It was in order to set this question at rest for ever that I took some trouble to hunt out the history of Squire Strangway's two sons and only daughter. I traced them all three to their graves, and have been able to convince Juanita that they and their troubles were at rest long before the time of her husband's murder."

"What could have put such a notion into her head?"

"Oh, it came naturally enough. It was only a development of Churton's idea of a vendetta."

"She was always full of fancies. Yes, I remember she used to say the house was haunted by the ghosts of the Strangways. I really think she had a dim idea that I had injured that spendthrift race in buying the estate which they had wasted. And so to satisfy Juanita you took the trouble to ferret out Miss Newton? Upon my word, Theodore, your conduct is more Quixotic than I could have believed of any young man in the nineteenth century. And pray by what means did you discover the *ci-devant* governess?"

Theodore told the story of his visit to the scholastic agencies, his journey to Westmorland, and his friendly reception by Miss Newton in her Lambeth lodgings.

"She was much attached to Miss Strangway, who was her first charge, and near enough to her own age to be more of a companion than a pupil," he said, "and she spoke of her melancholy fate with great tenderness."

"It was a melancholy fate, was it? I know she made a runaway-marriage; but in what way was her fate sadder than the common destiny of a spendthrift's daughter—a girl who has been reared in extravagance and self-indulgence, and who finds herself face to face with penury in the bloom of her womanhood?"

"That in itself would be sad, but Miss Strangway's destiny was sadder than that—commonplace enough, no doubt—only the old story of an unhappy marriage and a runaway wife."

He could not help looking at Lord Cheriton at this point, thinking how this common story of an unfaithful wife must needs remind his kinsman of that other story of another wife which had influenced his early manhood. He must surely have a sensitive shrinking from the discussion of any similar story.

"She ran away from her husband! Yes, I remember having heard as much. What did Miss Newton know about her—beyond that one fact?"

"Very little—only that she died at Boulogne nearly twenty years ago. This fact Miss Newton heard from the lips of the man for whom Mrs. Darcy left her husband. I had been at Boulogne a week or so before I saw Miss Newton, and I had hunted there for any record of Mrs. Darcy's death, without result. But this is not very strange, as it is quite likely that she lived at Boulogne under an assumed name, and was buried in that name, and so lies there, in a foreign land, dissevered for ever from any association with her name and kindred."

"There are not many of her kindred left, I take it," said Lord Cheriton. "There seems to have been a blight upon that race for the last half-century. But, now, tell me about some one in whom I am more interested—the girl you believe to be Mercy Porter. I

should be very glad to make her life happier, and so I told her ladyship. You, Theodore, might be the intermediary. I would allow her a hundred a year, which would enable her to live in some pretty country place—in Devonshire or Cornwall, for instance, in some quiet sea-coast village where no one would know anything about her or her story."

"A hundred a year! My dear Cheriton, that is a most generous offer."

"No, no, there is no question of generosity. Her father was my friend, and I was under some obligation to him. And then the girl was my wife's *protégée*; and, finally, I can very well afford it. I am almost a childless man, Theodore. My grandson will be rich enough when I am gone, rich enough to be sure of a peerage, I hope, so that there may be a Baron Cheriton when I am in the dust."

"You are very good. I believe this girl has a great deal of pride—the pride of a woman who has drunk the cup of shame, and she may set herself against being your pensioner; but if the matter can be arranged as you wish she may yet see happier days. I think the first thing to be done is to reconcile mother and daughter. Mrs. Porter ought to go up to London——"

"To see Miss Newton's *protégée*? On no account. I tell you Mrs. Porter is a woman of strange temper—God knows how bitterly she might upbraid her daughter. And if the girl is proud, as you say she is, the mother's reproaches would goad her to refuse any help from me or my wife. No, Theodore, the longer we keep mother and daughter apart, the better for Mercy's chances of happiness."

"But if this young woman should refuse to confess her identity with Mercy Porter it will be impossible to benefit her."

"That difficulty may be easily overcome. You can take my wife to see her. She was always fond of my wife."

"And you will leave the mother out of the question. That seems rather hard upon her."

"I tell you, Theodore, it is better to leave the mother out of the question. She never acted a mother's part to Mercy—there was never any real motherly love—at least that was Lady Cheriton's opinion of the woman, and she had ample opportunity for judging, which, of course, I had not. If you want to help the daughter, keep the mother aloof from her."

"I dare say you are right, and I shall of course obey you implicitly," said Theodore, inwardly reluctant.

He had an exalted idea of maternal love, its obligations and privileges, and it seemed to him a hard thing to come between a penitent daughter and a mother whose heart ought to be full of pity and pardon. Yet he remembered his brief interview with Mrs. Porter, and he could but own to himself that this might be an exceptional case.

CHAPTER XXV.

"And from that time to this I am alone,
And I shall be alone until I die."

THEODORE and his friend strolled across the Park on Saturday afternoon in the direction of the west gate, Cuthbert Ramsay intent upon carrying out his intention of introducing himself to Mrs. Porter, and Theodore submitting meekly to be led as it were into the lion's den.

"You have no idea what hard stuff this woman is made of," he said; and then he told Ramsay what Lord Cheriton had said to him about Mrs. Porter on the previous evening, and how the daughter's life was to be made happy, if possible, without reference to the mother.

"The harder she is the more I am interested in making her acquaintance," replied Cuthbert. "I don't care a jot about commonplace women, were they as lovely as Aphrodite. I go to see this soured widow as eagerly as Romeo scaled Juliet's balcony. Did his lordship ever tell you what it was that soured the creature, by the way? That kind of hardness is generally in somewise the result of circumstance, even where there is the adamantine quality in the original character."

"I never heard any details about the lady's past life; only that her husband was in the merchant navy, upon the India and China line--that he died suddenly and left her penniless—that she was a lady by birth and education, and had married somewhat beneath her. I have often wondered how my cousin, as a barrister, came to be intimate with a captain in the merchant service."

They were at the gates of the Park by this time, and close to the rustic steps which led up to Mrs. Porter's garden. It was one of those tropical days which often occur towards the end of August, and the clusters of cactus dahlias in the old-fashioned border, and the tall hollyhocks in the background, made patches of dazzling colour in the bright white light, against which the cool grays of the stone cottage offered repose to the eye. One side of the cottage was starred with passion-flowers, and on the other the great waxen chalices of the magnolia showed creamy white against the scarlet of the trumpet ash. It was the season at which Mrs. Porter's

hermitage put on its gayest aspect, the crowning feast of bloom and colour before the chilling breath of autumn brought rusty reds and pallid grays into the picture.

The two young men heard voices as they approached the steps, and on looking upward, Theodore saw the curate and his wife standing on the little grass-plot with Mrs. Porter. There could hardly be a better opportunity for approaching her, as she was caught in the act of receiving visitors, and could not deny herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Kempster were young people, and of that social temperament which will make friends under the hardest conditions. Mr. Kempster belonged to the advanced Anglican school, and ministered the offices of the Church as it were with his life in his hand, always prepared for the moment when he should come into collision with his Bishop upon some question of posture or vestments. He had introduced startling innovations into the village church, and hoped to be able to paraphrase the boast of Augustus, and to say that he found Cheriton Evangelical and left it Ritualistic. Needless to say, that while he gratified one half of his congregation he offended the other half, and that old-fashioned parishioners complained bitterly of his "gewgaws fetched from Aaron's old wardrobe or the flamen's vestry." Mrs. Kempster had work enough to do in smoothing down the roughened furs of these antediluvians, which smoothing process she effected chiefly by a rigorous system of polite afternoon calls, in which no inhabitant of the parish was forgotten, and an occasional small expenditure in the shape of afternoon tea and halfpenny buns toasted and buttered by her own fair hands. She was a bright, good-tempered little woman, whom her husband generally spoke of as a "body."

The Kempsters had just accepted Mrs. Porter's invitation to tea, and were making an admiring inspection of her garden before going into the cottage.

"I don't believe any one in Cheriton parish has such roses as you, Mrs. Porter," said the curate's wife, gazing admiringly at the standard Gloire de Dijon, which had grown into gigantic dimensions in the middle of the grass-plot. "I never saw such a tree; but then, you see, you give your mind to your garden as none of us can."

"I have very little else to think about, certainly," said Mrs. Porter.

"Except Algernon's sermons. I know you appreciate them," cried Mrs. Kempster, in her chirruping little voice. "Algernon says no one listens as attentively as you do. 'She quite carries me away sometimes with that rapt look of hers,' he said the other day. I am half inclined to feel jealous of you, Mrs. Porter. Oh, here is Mr. Dalbrook. How d'ye do, Mr. Dalbrook?"

Mrs. Kempster shook hands with Theodore before he could

approach Mrs. Porter, but having got past this vivacious lady, he introduced Cuthbert Ramsay to the mistress of the house.

"My friend is a stranger in the neighbourhood, Mrs. Porter," he said, "and he was so struck by the beauty of your cottage yesterday, that he set his heart upon being introduced to you, and I was really obliged to bring him."

"My cottage is not generally considered a show place, Mr. Dalbrook," she answered coldly, turning her dull gray eyes full upon Theodore with a look which made him uncomfortable, "but I shall be very happy to show it to your friend—and his lordship's friend, I conclude."

"I don't know if I dare claim that distinction, Mrs. Porter," answered Cuthbert, in his cheerful resonant voice. "This is my first visit to the Chase; and if Lord Cheriton has received me with open arms it is only because I am his kinsman's friend."

Theodore introduced the stranger to the Kempsters, who welcomed him eagerly, as one who came fraught with the interests and excitements of the outer world.

"May I ask if our man has got in for Southwark?" demanded Mr. Kempster. "His lordship would be sure to get a telegram after the polling."

"I blush to say that I forgot all about the election, and didn't ask after the telegram," replied Cuthbert. "When you say 'our man,' you mean——"

"The Conservative candidate. I conclude you belong to us."

"Again I blush to say I don't belong to you the least little bit. I am an advanced Liberal."

Mr. Kempster sighed, with a sigh that was almost a groan.

"A destroyer and disestablisher of everything that has made the glory of England since the days of the Heptarchy," he said, plaintively.

"Well, yes, there have been a good many false gods toppled over, and a good many groves of Baal cut down, since the Saxon Kings ruled over the Seven Kingdoms. You don't want Baal and the rest of them stuck up again, do you, Mr. Kempster?"

"Mr. Ramsay, there are times and seasons when I would to God I could wake up in the morning and find myself a subject of King Egbert. Yes, when I see the rising tide of anarchy—the advancing legions of unbelief—the Upas Tree of sensual science," said Kempster, slipping airily from metaphor to metaphor, "I would gladly lay hold upon all that was most rigid and uncompromising among the bulwarks of the past. I would belong to the Church of Wolsey and A'Becket. I would lie prostrate before the altar at which St. Augustine was celebrant. I would grovel at the feet of Dunstan."

"Ah, Mr. Kempster, we can't go back. That's the plague of it, for romantic minds like yours. I am afraid we have done with the

picturesque in religion and in everything else. We are children of light—of the fierce white light of science and common sense. We may regret the scenic darkness of mediævalism, but we cannot go back to it. The clouds of ignorance and superstition have rolled away, and we stand out in the open, in the searching light of truth. We know what we are, and whom we serve."

At Mrs. Porter's invitation they all followed her into the cottage parlour, where the tea-table stood ready, and much more elegantly appointed than that modest board which the curate's wife was wont to spread for her friends. Here there appeared both old china and old silver, and the tea which Mrs. Porter's slender white hands dispensed was of as delicate an aroma as that choice Indian pekoe which Theodore occasionally enjoyed in Lady Cheriton's boudoir.

Mrs. Porter placed herself with her back to the window, but Cuthbert's keen eyes were able to note every change in her countenance as she listened to the conversation going on round her, or on rare occasions took part in it. He observed that she was curiously silent, and he was of opinion that Theodore's presence was in some manner painful to her. She addressed him now and then, but with an effort which was evident to those studious eyes of Cuthbert Ramsay's, though it might escape any less keen observer.

The conversation was of politics and of the outer world for the first ten minutes, and was obviously uninteresting to Mrs. Kempster, who fidgeted with her teaspoon, made several attempts to speak, and had to wait her opportunity, but finally succeeded in engaging Theodore's attention.

"Have you seen Lady Carmichael lately, Mr. Dalbrook?" she inquired.

"I saw her three days ago."

"And how did you find her? In better spirits I hope? She hardly ever comes to Cheriton now, and her old friends know very little about her. I am told she has a horror of the place, though she was once so fond of it. Poor thing, it is only natural! You found an improvment in her, I hope?"

"Yes, I saw at least the beginning of improvement," answered Theodore. "Her child give a new interest to her life."

"What a blessing that is! And by-and-by she will meet some one else who will interest her even more than her baby, and she will marry again. She is too young to go on grieving for ever. Don't you think so, Mrs. Porter?"

"Yes, I suppose she will forget sooner or later. Most women have a faculty for forgetting."

"Most women, but not all women," said Cuthbert, with his earnest air, which made the commonest words mean more from him than from other men. "I do not think you would be the kind of woman to forget very quickly, Mrs. Porter."

She was in no hurry to notice this remark, but went on pouring out tea quietly for a minute or two before she replied.

"There is not much room in my life for forgetfulness," she said, after that protracted pause. "So without being in any way an exceptional person, I may lay claim to a good memory."

"She remembers her daughter, and yet memory does not soften her heart," thought Theodore. "With her, memory means implacability."

He looked round the room, in the flickering light of the sunshine that crept in between the bars of the Venetian shutters. He had not expected ever to be sitting at his ease in Mrs. Porter's parlour after that unpromising conversation upon the first day of the year. He looked round the room, thoughtfully contemplative of every detail in its arrangement which served to tell him what manner of woman Mrs. Porter was. He was not a close student of character like Ramsay; he had made for himself no scientific code of human expression in eye and lip and head and hand; but it seemed to him always that the room in which a man or a woman lived gave a useful indication of that man's or that woman's mental qualities.

This room testified that its mistress was a lady. The furniture was heterogeneous—shabby for the most part, from an upholsterer's point of view, old-fashioned without being antique; but there was nevertheless a *cachet* upon every object which told that it had been chosen by a person of taste, from the tall Chippendale bureau which filled one corner of the room, to the solid carved oak table which held the tea-tray. The ornaments were few, but they were old china, and china of some mark from the collector's point of view; the draperies were of Madras muslin, spotless, and fresh as a spring morning. Theodore noticed, however, that there were no flowers in the vases, and none of those scattered trifles which usually mark the presence of refined womanhood. The room would have had a bare and chilly aspect, lacking these things, if it had not been for a few pictures, and for the bookshelves, which were filled with handsomely bound books.

"You have a nice library, Mrs. Porter," he said, somewhat aimlessly, as he took a cup of tea from her hands. "I suppose you are a great reader?"

"Yes, I read a great deal. I have my books and my garden. Those make up my sum of life."

"May I look at your books?"

"If you like," she answered coldly.

He went about the small, low room—so low, with its heavily-timbered ceiling, that Cuthbert Ramsay's head almost touched the crossbeams—and surveyed the collections of books in their different blocks. Whoever had so arranged them had exercised both taste and dexterity. Everything in the room fitted like a Chinese puzzle,

and everything seemed to have been adapted to those few pieces of old furniture — the walnut-wood bureau, the oak table, and the old Italian chairs. The books were theological or metaphysical for the most part, but among them he found Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus," "Past and Present," and "French Revolution;" Bulwer's mystical stories, and a few books upon magic, ancient and modern.

"I see you have a fancy for the black art, Mrs. Porter," he said lightly. "One would hardly expect to find such books as these in the Isle of Purbeck."

"I like to know what men and women have built their hopes upon in the ages that are gone," she answered. "Those dreams may seem foolishness to us now, but they were very real to the dreamers, and there were some who dreamed on till the final slumber —the one dreamless sleep."

This was the longest speech she had made since the young men entered her garden, and both were struck by this sudden gleam of animation. Even the large grey eyes brightened for a few moments, but only to fade again to that same dull, unflinching gaze which made them more difficult to meet than any other eyes Theodore Dalbrook had ever looked upon. That unflinching stare froze his blood; he felt a restraint and an embarrassment which no other woman had ever caused him.

It was different with Cuthbert Ramsay. He was as much at his ease in Mrs. Porter's parlour as if he had known that lady all her life. He looked at her books without asking permission. He moved about with a wonderful airiness of movement which never brought him into anybody's way. He fascinated Mrs. Kempster, and subjugated her husband, and impressed everybody by that strong individuality which raises some men a head and shoulders above the common herd. It would have been the same had there been a hundred people in the room instead of five.

Mrs. Porter relapsed into silence, and the conversation was carried on chiefly by Cuthbert Ramsay and the Curate, until Mrs. Kempster declared that she must be going, lest the children should be unhappy at her absence from their evening meal.

"I make a point of seeing them at their tea," she said; "and then they say their prayers to me before nurse puts them to bed—so prettily, and Laura sings a hymn with such a sweet little voice. I am sure she will be musical by-and-by, if it is only by the way she stands beside the piano and listens while I sing. And such an ear as that child has, as fine as a bird's! You must come and hear her sing 'Abide with me,' some day, Mrs. Porter, when you drop in to take a cup of tea."

Mrs. Porter murmured something to the effect that she would be pleased to enjoy that privilege.

"Ah, but you never come to tea with me, though I am always asking you. I'm afraid you are not very fond of children."

"I am not used to them, and I don't think that children like people who are out of the habit of associating with them," answered Mrs. Porter deliberately. "I never know what to say to a child. My life has been too grave and too solitary for me to be fit company for children."

The Curate and his wife took leave and went briskly down the steps to the lane, and Theodore made a little movement towards departure, but Cuthbert Ramsay lingered, as if he were really loth to go.

"I am absolutely in love with your cottage, Mrs. Porter," he said; "it is an ideal abode, and I can fancy a lady of your studious habits being perfectly happy in this tranquil spot."

"The life suits me well enough," she answered icily, "perhaps better than any other."

"You have a piano yonder, I see," he said, glancing through the half-open door to an inner room with a latticed window, beyond which a sunlit garden on a bit of shelving ground sloped upwards to the edge of the low hill-side, the garden vanishing into an upland meadow, where cows were seen grazing against the evening light. This second sitting-room was more humbly furnished than the parlour in which they had been taking tea, and its chief feature was a cottage piano, which stood diagonally between the lattice and the small fireplace.

"You too are musical, I conclude," pursued Cuthbert, "like little Miss Kempster."

"I am very fond of music."

"Might we be favoured by hearing you play something?"

"I never play before people. I played tolerably once, perhaps—at least my master was good enough to say so. But I play now only snatches of music, by fits and starts, as the humour seizes me."

She seated herself by the casement with a resigned air, as much as to say, "Are these young men never going?" Her long, thin fingers busied themselves in plucking the faded leaves from the pelargoniums which made a bank of colour on the broad window ledge.

"You were at home at the time of the murder, I suppose, Mrs. Porter?" said Cuthbert, after a pause, during which he had occupied himself in looking at the water-colour sketches on the walls, insignificant enough, but good of their kind, and arguing a cultivated taste in the person who collected them.

"I am never away from home."

"And you heard and saw nothing out of the common course—you have no suspicion of any one?"

"Do you suppose if I had it would not have been made known

to the police immediately after the murder? Do you think I should hoard and treasure up a suspicion, or a scrap of circumstantial evidence till you came to ask me for it?" she said, with suppressed irritation.

"Pray forgive me. I had no idea of offending you by my question. It is natural that any one coming to Cheriton Chase for the first time should feel a morbid interest in that mysterious murder."

"If you had heard it talked about as much as I have you would be as weary of the subject as I am," said Mrs. Porter, rather more courteously. "I have discussed it with the local police and the London police, with his Lordship, with the doctor, with Mr. Dalbrook's father, with Lady Carmichael, with Lady Jane Carmichael, these having all a right to question me—and with a good many other people in the neighbourhood who had no right to question me. I answer you as I answered them. No, I saw nothing, I heard nothing on that fatal night—nor in the week before that fatal night, nor at any period of Lady Carmichael's honeymoon. Whoever the murderer was he did not come in a carriage and summon my servant to unlock the gate for him. The footpath through the Park is open all night. There was nothing to hinder a stranger coming in and going out—and the chances were a thousand to one, I fancy, against his being observed—once clear of the house. That is all I know about it."

"And as an old resident upon the property you have no knowledge of any one who had a grudge against Lord Cheriton or his daughter—such a feeling as might prompt the murder of the lady's husband as a mode of retaliation upon the lady or her father?"

"I know no such person, and I have never considered the crime from such a point of view. It is too far-fetched a notion."

"Perhaps. Yet where a crime is apparently motiveless the mainspring must be looked for below the surface. Only a far-fetched theory can serve in such a case."

"Shall I tell you what I think about the murder, Mr. Ramsay?" asked Mrs. Porter, looking up at him suddenly, and fixing him with those steady grey eyes.

"Pray do."

"I think that no one upon God's earth will ever know who fired that shot. Only at the Day of Judgment will the murderer stand revealed, and then the secret of the crime and the motive will stand forth written in fire upon the scroll that records men's wrongs and sorrows and sins. You and I, and all of us, may read the story there, perhaps, in that day when we shall stand as shadows before the great white throne."

"I believe you are right, Mrs. Porter," answered Cuthbert, quietly, holding out his hand to take leave. "A secret that has been kept

for more than a year is likely to be kept till we are all in our graves. The murderer himself will be the one to tell it, perhaps. There are men who are proud of a bloody revenge, as if it were a noble deed. Good day to you, Mrs. Porter, and many thanks for your friendly reception."

He held the thin, cold hand in his own as he said this, looking earnestly at the imperturbable face, and then he and Theodore left the cottage.

"Well, Cuthbert, what do you think of that woman?" asked Theodore, after they had passed through the gate, and into the quiet of the long glade where the fallow deer were browsing in the fading day.

"I think a good deal about her, but I haven't thought out my opinion yet. Has she ever been off her head?"

"Not to my knowledge. She has lived in that house for twenty years. I never heard that there was anything wrong with her mentally."

"I believe there is something, or has been something very wrong. There is madness in that women's eye. It may be the indication of past trouble, or it may be a warning of an approaching disturbance. She is a woman who has suffered intensely, and who has acquired an abnormal power of self-restraint. I should like to know her history."

"My God, Cuthbert," cried Theodore, grasping him by the arm, and coming suddenly to a standstill, "do you know what your words suggest—to what your conclusion points? The murder of my cousin's husband was an act of vengeance, or of lunacy. We have made up our minds about that, have we not? The detective, Juanita, you and I, everybody. We are looking for some wretch capable of a blindly malignant revenge, or for homicidal madness, with its unreasoning thirst for blood; and here, here at these gates is a woman whom you suspect of madness, a woman who could have had access to the gardens at any hour, who knew the habits and hours of the servants, who would know how to elude observation."

"My dear fellow, you are going a great deal too far. Who said I suspected that unhappy woman of homicidal madness? The brain disease I suspect in Mrs. Porter is melancholia, the result of long years of self-restraint and solitude, the not unfrequent consequence of continuous brooding upon a secret grief."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirred,
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those days I heard."

THAT suggestion of Cuthbert Ramsay's of latent madness in the lodge-keeper came upon Theodore like a flash of lurid light, and gave a new colour to all his thoughts. It was in vain that his friend reminded him of the wide distinction between the fury of the homicidal lunatic and the settled melancholy of a mind warped by misfortune. After that conversation in the Park he was haunted by Mrs. Porter's image, and he found his mind distracted between two opposite ideas; one pointing to the man who had claimed Mrs. Danvers as his wife, the deserted and betrayed husband of James Dalbrook's mistress; the other dwelling upon the image of this woman living at his kinsman's gate, with an existence which was unsatisfactorily explained by the scanty facts which he had been able to gather about her former history.

He recalled her conduct about her daughter, her cold and almost vindictive rejection of the penitent sinner; her stern resolve to stand alone in the world.

Was that madness, or the consciousness of guilt, or what? It was conduct too unnatural to be accounted for easily, consider it how he might. He had heard often enough of fathers refusing to be reconciled with erring or disobedient children. The flinty hardness of the father's heart has become proverbial. But an unforgiving mother seems an anomaly in nature.

He determined upon confiding Ramsay's opinion and his own doubts to Lord Cheriton without delay.

Whatever abnormal circumstances there had been in Mrs. Porter's history, her benefactor was likely to be acquainted with them; and if those circumstances had affected her intellect it was vital that he should be made aware of the fact before evil of any kind could arise.

He contrived an after-dinner stroll upon the terrace with his kinsman as upon the previous evening, and entered upon the subject without loss of time.

"Ramsay and I took our afternoon-tea with Mrs. Porter," he said.

"Indeed! How did that come about? She is not a sociable person in a general way, or accessible to strangers."

"It was to gratify a fancy of Ramsay's that I went there. He admired her cottage and was interested in her history, and took it into his head that she was a woman of exceptional character."

"He was not far wrong there, I believe. Mrs. Porter is a very hard nut to crack. I have never been able to fathom her."

"And yet with your knowledge of her previous history you must have the safest clue to her character."

"I don't know about that. There is nothing exceptional in her history—and there is much that is exceptional in her character, as your friend says. Pray what was the result of his observation of the lady in the leisure of afternoon tea-drinking?"

"He believed that he saw the traces of madness in her countenance and manner; madness either past, present, or impending. He could not decide which."

There was not light enough upon the terrace to show Theodore any change in his cousin's countenance, but the movement of Lord Cheriton's hand as he took the cigar from his mouth, and the sudden slackening of his pace were sufficient indications of troubled thought. It could hardly be pleasant for him to hear so melancholy a suggestion about the pensioner whom he had established in comfort at his gate, intending that she should enjoy his bounty for all the days of her life.

"Upon what does your friend base this fantastical notion?" he asked angrily.

"Upon physiological and psychological evidence. You can question him, if you like. It appears to me that you ought to know the truth."

"I have no objection to hear anything he may have to say, but it is very unlikely I shall be influenced by him. These young men, who are by way of being savants, are full of crochets and theories. They look at every one as Darwin looked at a Virginia creeper or a cowslip, with a preconceived notion that they must find out something about him. I believe Mrs. Porter, with her calm, impassible nature, is much better able to reckon up your friend Ramsay than he is able to come to a correct opinion about her."

"I should like you to discuss the question with him, at any rate," said Theodore. "The horror of last year's calamity is a reason you should have nobody about the estate whom you cannot trust."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that while you have madness at your gate you may have murder in your house."

"Theodore! You cannot be so cruel as to associate that unhappy woman with Godfrey Carmichael's death?"

"God knows! That murder has to be accounted for somehow. Can you, as Juanita's father, know rest or peace till it has been accounted for? I could not, in your place."

"I hope you do not think it necessary to teach me my duty to my daughter," said Lord Cheriton coldly; and Theodore felt that he had said too much.

His cousin addressed him upon some indifferent subject a minute or so afterwards, when he had lighted a fresh cigar, and his manner resumed its usual friendliness. There was no further mention of Mrs. Porter that night, but on Sunday Lord Cheriton walked home from church with Cuthbert Ramsay, and questioned him as to his impressions about the lodge-keeper.

"Theodore has exaggerated the significance of my remark," explained Cuthbert. "I take it Mrs. Porter's case is one of slight aberration brought on by much brooding upon troubles, real or imaginary. If my power to diagnose is worth anything, her mind has lost its balance, her thoughts have lost their adjusting power. She is like a piece of mechanism that has got out of square, and will only work one way. You may hardly consider that this amounts to madness, and I may have done wrong in speaking of it: only were Mrs. Porter concerned in my existence, I should feel it incumbent on me to watch her; and I recommend you to have her watched, so far as it can be done without alarming or annoying her."

"I will do what I can. I will get another opinion from a man of long experience in mental cases. I have an old friend in the medical profession, a specialist, who has made mental disease the study of his life. He will give me any advice I want."

"You cannot do better than get his opinion of Mrs. Porter, if you are interested in her welfare."

"I am interested in all who are dependent upon me, and in her especially, on account of old associations."

Lady Carmichael drove over to Cheriton after luncheon, upon one of those Sunday visits which she paid from time to time in deference to her father, albeit she could never approach the house without pain. She came in the useful family landau, which had carried the Misses Carmichael to tennis parties, dinners, and dances, before they married, and which now conveyed the nurse and baby on their visits to Cheriton. She came for what Lady Cheriton called a long afternoon, and she was received in the library, which was now the most used room in the house. No one cared to occupy that fatal drawing-room; and although it was always accessible, and there was a feint of daily occupation, its cold elegance was for the most part untenanted.

"And over all there hung a cloud of fear."

To-day, for the first time, Theodore discovered numerous alter-

ations in the arrangement of pictures and furniture in the hall. He had promised Cuthbert to show him the portraits of the Strangways, and most particularly that picture of the Squire's three children, painted nearly forty years before; but he found that this picture, among others, had been removed, and that a fine Rhodian plate occupied its place on the dark oak panelling.

He noticed the fact to his cousin.

"I am sorry to miss the family group," he said. "It was a really interesting picture."

"Interesting to you perhaps, who knew the history of the race," answered Lord Cheriton, "but very uninteresting to a stranger. I think I've made an improvement over there. That plate is a splendid bit of colour, and lights up a dark corner. But that was not my motive. I wanted to make such trifling alterations as would change the aspect of the hall for Juanita, without any ostensible refurnishing. I have done the same thing in the library. The changes there are slight, but the room is not as it was when she and her husband occupied it."

"I should like to show Ramsay the Strangway portraits, if they are get-at-able."

"They are not just at present. The canvases were rotting, and I have sent them to London to be lined. You can show them to your friend by-and-by, when I get them back."

Mr. Ramsay's thoughts seemed a long way from the Strangway portraits this afternoon, although he had expressed a curiosity as to the lineaments of that luckless race. He was out in the garden—in Lady Cheriton's rose garden—with Juanita and her son, and was giving further proofs of his adaptability to infantile society. The grandmother was of the party, looking on with profound admiration at that phase of awakening intellect which is described as "taking notice." It was held now as an established fact that the infant Godfrey James Dalbrook took notice, and that his notice dwelt with especial favour upon Cuthbert Ramsay.

"I think it must be because you are so tall and big," said Juanita lightly. "He feels your power, and he wants to conciliate you."

"Artful little beggar! No, that is much too low a view. There is a magnetic affinity between us—love at first sight. When babies do take a fancy they are thoroughly in earnest about it. Loafing about in the New Cut sometimes, studying human nature from the Saturday night point of view, I have had a poor woman's baby take a fancy to me—a poor little elfin creature, a year old perhaps, and not half so big as this bloated aristocrat, a sour-smelling baby which would give you *mal au cœur*, Lady Carmichael; and the wretched little waif would hook on to my elephantine finger and cleave to me as if I were its mother. Oh, how sorry I have felt for such a baby—with the pure starry eyes of infancy shining in the flabby withered

face that has grown old for want of cold water and fresh air! For such infancy and for stray dogs I have suffered acutest agonies of pity—and yet I have done nothing—only pitied and passed on. That is the worst of us. We can all pity, but we don't act upon the divine impulse. You may be sure the Levite felt very sorry for the wounded traveller, though he did not see his way to helping him."

This was one of Cuthbert's tirades, which he was wont to indulge in when he found himself in congenial society; and Juanita's society was particularly congenial to him. He felt as if no other woman had ever sympathized with him or understood him—and he gave her credit for doing both. Never had he felt so happy in the society of any woman, as he felt in this sunlit garden to-day, among the roses which were just now blooming in a riotous luxuriance, the branching heads of standards top-heavy with great balls of blossom, swaying gently in the summer wind.

He had expected to see her a gloomy creature, self-conscious in her grief—but the child's little fingers had loosened her heart-strings. If she was not gay, she was at least able to endure gaiety in others. She listened to the young man's rhapsodies and paradoxes with a gentle smile; she admired her mother's roses. She cast no shadow upon the quiet happiness of the summer afternoon, that tranquil contentedness which belongs to the loveliness of Nature, and which makes a blessed pause in the story of human passion and human discontent. It was one of those summer afternoons which make one say to oneself, "Could life be always thus what a blessed thing it were to live!" and then the sound of evening bells breaks the spell, and the shadows creep across the woods, and it is dinner time, and all that halcyon peace is over.

How lovely she looked in her simply-made black gown, with its closely-fitting bodice and straight flowing skirt, of that thick lustreless silk which falls in such statuesque folds! The plain little white crape cap seemed in perfect harmony with that raven hair and pure white forehead. She was unlike any other woman Cuthbert Ramsay had ever known. There was not one touch of society slang, nor of the society manner of looking at life. She had passed through the fiery ordeal of two London seasons unscorched in the furnace. Love had been the purifying influence. She had never lived upon the excitement of every-day pleasures and volatile loves, the intermittent fever of flirtations and engagements that are on and off half a dozen times in a season. The influence that guided all her thoughts and all her actions had been one steadfast and single-minded love. She had cared for no praises but from her lover's lips; she had dressed and danced, and played and sung, for none other than he. And now in her devotion to her child there was the same concentration and simplicity. She did not know that she was looking her love-

liest in that severe black gown and white cap; she did not know that Cuthbert Ramsay admired her far too much for his peace. She only felt that he was very sincere in his devotion to the baby, and that he was a clever young man whose society suggested new ideas, and made her for the moment forgetful of her grief.

It was evening before she left Cheriton. She had stayed later than usual, and the shadows were creeping over the park as she walked to the west gate with Theodore and his friend, the carriage following slowly with nurse and baby ensconced among light fleecy wraps, lest vesper breezes should visit that human blossom too roughly. Theodore had proposed the walk across the park, and Juanita had assented immediately.

"I am always glad of a walk," she said. "I have so few excuses for a ramble nowadays. I have to stay at home to take care of baby."

"Do you doubt the capabilities of that highly-experienced nurse?" asked Ramsay laughingly.

"I doubt every one but myself, and I sometimes doubt even my own discretion where my precious one is concerned."

"You will have more reason to doubt by-and-by when your precious one is old enough to be spoilt," said Theodore. "He has begun to take notice, and before very long he will notice that he is monarch of all he surveys, and that everybody about him is more or less his slave. He will live in that atmosphere till you send him to Eton, and then he will find himself suddenly confronted with the hard, cruel world of strictly Republican boyhood, which will jostle and hustle him with ruthless equality."

Lady Cheriton had business in London early in the following week. She was going to London to see her dentist, and her dressmaker, the latter being one of the arbiters of fashion who never go out of their way to wait upon their clients, but who do the rather exact reverence and attention from those clients. She had shopping to do at the West-end of London, that shopping which is so delightful to a lady who spends two-thirds of the year in the country. Above all, she had things to get at the "Stores," an institution which was dear to Lady Cheriton's heart, in spite of all her husband's lectures upon political economy and the necessity of sustaining private enterprise and the shopkeeping interest.

Hearing of these engagements, and that Lady Cheriton intended to spend two nights in Victoria Street, Theodore suggested that he should be allowed to accompany her ladyship to London and to arrange a meeting between her and the young woman who called herself Marian Gray.

"If you really wish to help her," he concluded.

"I do really wish it," answered Lord Cheriton earnestly, "and

the sooner the matter is put in hand the better pleased I shall be. Shall my wife call on this person?"

"She is very proud and very reserved. It might be better to bring about a meeting which would appear accidental. Marian goes for a walk with Miss Newton once or twice a week. I could arrange with her good friend that they should be walking in a particular place—Battersea Park, for instance—at a certain hour, and Lady Cheriton could drive that way with me, and we could meet them. It would be the easiest way of arriving at the truth as to Marian Gray's identity with Mercy Porter."

"Very good. You might suggest that to my wife."

Lady Cheriton, who was the soul of good-nature, fell in at once with Theodore's idea.

"I would do anything in my power to help that poor girl," she said; "for I think her sadly to be pitied. Her girlhood was so dull and joyless—such a ceaseless round of lessons and practice, without any of those pleasures to which most school-girls look forward. Her mother seemed to take a pride in keeping the girl apart from every one, in dressing her plainly, and in making her whole life as dreary as she could. I hardly wonder that the poor, hopeless creature surrendered to the first tempter—a man whose manner to women had always been called irresistible, even by women of the world, and a man who would not shrink from any amount of falsehood in pursuing his wicked aim. And now she is paying forfeit for her sin with a lonely life of toil in a London garret. Poor Mercy! She was so pretty and so refined—a lady in all her instincts."

Cuthbert Ramsay left on Monday, promising to return at the end of the week; and Theodore went up to town with Lady Cheriton on the following Wednesday. He went straight from the terminus to Wedgewood Street, where he saw Miss Newton, told her of Lord Cheriton's benevolent intentions to Marian, alias Mercy, and arranged the walk in Battersea Park for the following afternoon. Miss Newton and her *protégée* were to be walking upon the pathway beside the river at half-past three o'clock, when Lady Cheriton would drive that way.

Miss Newton had no difficulty in carrying out her part of the little plot. Marian was always ready to put aside her work for the pleasure of an afternoon with that one friend to whom her heart was ever open. She met Miss Newton at the starting-place of the tram-car, and they rode through the dusty crowded highways to the People's Park, where the flower-beds were gaudy with the rank luxuriance that is the beginning of the end of summer's good things, and where the geranium leaves were riddled by voracious slugs. There was a dustiness and worn-out air upon all the foliage and all the flowers, despite the coolness that came from the swiftly-flowing

river—an air of fading and decay which pervades even the outermost regions of London when the season is over and the world of fashion has fled—the air of a theatre when the play is done and the lights are extinguished.

Sarah Newton and her young friend walked slowly along the gravel pathway, looking dreamily at the bright river, with its gay movement of passing boats and flowing waters. The elder of the two friends, who was wont to be full of cheery talk of newspapers and books, the history of the present, and the history of the past, was to-day unusually grave and silent.

"I'm afraid you are not well, dear Miss Newton," said Marian, looking at her anxiously.

"Oh, yes, my dear, I am well enough. You know I am made of cast-iron, and except for the toothache, or a cold in my head, I hardly know what illness means. I am only a little thoughtful."

They walked a few paces in silence, and then Miss Newton stopped suddenly to admire an approaching carriage. "What a stylish Victoria! Why, I declare there is Mr. Dalbrook, with a lady!"

The carriage drew up as she spoke, and Theodore alighted. Marian had reddened a little at the mention of his name, but the flush upon her cheek deepened to crimson when she saw the lady in the carriage, and as the lady got out and came towards her the crimson faded to a deadly white.

"Mercy, child, I am glad with all my heart to find you," said Lady Cheriton, holding out both her hands.

She was determined that there should be no doubt in the young girl's mind as to her friendship and indulgence—that there should be nothing in the mode of her approach, in the tone of her voice, or the expression of her countenance that could bruise that broken reed. Love and pity looked out of those lovely southern eyes, which even in mature age retained much of their youthful beauty.

Mercy Porter went towards her, trembling, and with eyes brimming with tears. The calm, self-restrained nature had melted all at once at those gentle words in the familiar voice which had given her words of kindness and of praise in her desolate childhood. The transformation filled Theodore with wonder.

"Dear Lady Cheriton, I thought you would long ago have forgotten the wretched girl to whom you were once so kind," she faltered.

"No, Mercy, I have never forgotten you. I have always been sorry—deeply sorry for you. And when Mr. Dalbrook told me about having met a person who interested him—a person associated with Cheriton—I knew that person must be you. My dear girl, I thank God that we have found you. My cousin will call upon you to-morrow and talk to you about your future—and of our plans for making your life happier than it is."

"There is no need," said Mercy, quickly. "I get on very well as

I am. My life is quite good enough for me. I hope for nothing better, wish for nothing better."

"Nonsense, Mercy. His Lordship and I are your friends, and we mean to help you."

"I will accept help from no one, Lady Cheriton. I made up my mind about that long ago. I can earn my own living very well now. If ever my fingers or my eyes fail me—I can go to the workhouse. I am deeply thankful for your pity—but I ask for no more, I will accept no more."

"We will see about that, Mercy," said Lady Cheriton, with her gentle smile, quite unable to estimate the mental force in opposition to her.

She could understand a certain resistance, the pride of a sensitive nature painfully conscious of disgrace, unable to forget the past. She was prepared for a certain amount of difficulty in reconciling this proud nature to the acceptance of benefits; but she never for one moment contemplated an implacable resistance.

"Let me see your friend, Mercy," she said, "the lady who has been kind to you."

"Kind is a poor word. She has been my angel of deliverance. She has saved me from the great dismal swamp of self-abasement and despair."

Miss Newton had walked briskly ahead with Theodore, so as to leave Lady Cheriton and Mercy together. Mercy ran after her friend, and brought her back a little way, as Lady Cheriton advanced to meet her.

"Miss Newton, my one true and good friend in all this great world of London, and the only friend of my miserable childhood, Lady Cheriton," said Mercy, looking from one to the other with that intent look of thoughtful minds that work in narrow grooves.

"I thank you for being good to one in whose fate I am warmly interested, Miss Newton," said Lady Cheriton. "You have done the work of the good Samaritan, and at least one wounded heart blesses you."

They walked on a little way together, and Lady Cheriton spoke of the old house and the old family, the vanished race with which Sarah Newton had been associated in her girlhood.

"They are all dead, I understand?" she said, in conclusion.

"Yes, there is none left of the old family. They are not a fortunate race, and I fear there are few who regret them; but I cannot help feeling sorry that they are all gone. They have passed away like a dream when one awakens."

Lady Cheriton lingered on the river-side pathway for nearly half-an-hour, talking to Mercy and Miss Newton. Theodore left them together, after having obtained Mercy's permission to call at her lodgings on the following afternoon.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I saw her too.
Yes, but you must not love her.
I will not, as you do; to worship her,
As she is heavenly and a blessed goddess;
I love her as a woman."

A DECENT-LOOKING woman opened the door of the house in Hercules Buildings, and ushered Mr. Dalbrook up two flights of stairs to the small back-room in which Mercy Porter had lived her lonely life from year's end to year's end. The tasteful arrangement of that humble chamber struck Theodore at the first glance. He had seen such rooms at Cambridge, where an undergraduate of small means had striven to work wonders with a few shabby old sticks that had done duty for half-a-dozen other undergraduates, and which had been but of poorest quality when they issued, new and sticky with cheap varnish, from the emporium of a local upholsterer.

Mercy was very pale, and although she received her visitor with outward calmness, he could see that she had not yet recovered from yesterday's agitation.

"What induced you to take so much trouble to betray me, Mr. Dalbrook?" she asked.

"Betray is a very hard word, Miss Porter."

"You don't suppose that I believed yesterday's meeting was accidental? You took the trouble to bring Lady Cheriton across my path in order to satisfy your curiosity about my identity. Was that generous?"

"God knows that it was meant in your best interests. I knew that Lady Cheriton was your true and loyal friend—that she had more of the mother's instinct than your real mother, and that no pain could possibly come to you from any meeting with her. And then I had a very serious reason for bringing you together. It was absolutely necessary for me to make sure of your identity."

"Why necessary? What can it matter to you who I am?"

"Everything. I am the bearer of a very generous offer from Lord Cheriton—and it was essential that I should make that offer to the right person."

Mercy's face underwent a startling change at the sound of Lord Cheriton's name. She had been standing by the window in a listless attitude, just where she had risen to receive her visitor.

She drew herself suddenly to her fullest height, and looked at him with flushed cheeks and kindling eyes.

"I will accept no generosity from Lord Cheriton," she said. "I want nothing from him except to be let alone. I want nothing from Lady Cheriton except her sympathy, and I would rather have even that at a distance. You have done the greatest harm you could do me in bringing me face to face with my old life."

"Believe me I had but one feeling, anxiety for your happiness."

"What is my happiness to you?" she retorted, almost fiercely. "You are playing at philanthropy. You can do me no good—you may do me much evil. You see me contented with my life—accustomed to its hardships—happy in the possession of one true friend. Why come to me with officious offers of favours which I have never sought?"

"You are ungenerous, and unjust. From the first hour of our acquaintance I saw that you were of a different clay to that of the women among whom I found you—different by education, instinct, associations, family history. How could I help being interested in one who stood thus apart? How could I help wanting to know more of so exceptional a life?"

"Yes, you were interested, as you might have been in any other wreck—in any derelict vessel stranded on a lonely shore, battered, broken, empty, rudderless, picturesque in ruin. It was a morbid interest, an interest in human misery."

He stated his commission plainly and briefly. He told her that it was Lord Cheriton's earnest wish to provide for her future life—that he was ready, and even anxious, to settle a sum of money which would ensure her a comfortable income for the rest of her days. He urged upon her the consideration of the new happiness, and larger opportunities of helping others, which this competence would afford her; but she cut him short with an impatient movement of her head.

"Upon what ground does he base his generous offer?" she asked coldly.

"Upon the ground of his interest in your mother and yourself—an interest which it is only natural for him to feel in one who was brought up on his estate, and whose father was his friend. It may be also that he feels himself in some wise to blame for the great sorrow of your life."

"Tell him that I appreciate his noble contempt for money, his readiness to shed the sunshine of his prosperity upon so remote an outcast as myself; but tell him also that I would rather starve to death, slowly in this room, than I would accept the price of a loaf of bread from his hands. Do not hesitate to tell him this, in the plainest form of speech. It is only right that he should know the exact measure of my feelings towards him."

After this Theodore could only bow to her decision and leave her.

"Lord Cheriton is my cousin, and a man whom I have every reason to regard with affection and respect," he began.

She interrupted him sharply.

"He has never denied the cousinship, never treated you as the dirt under his feet—never looked down upon you from the altitude of his grandeur, with insufferable patronage——"

"Never. He has been most unaffectedly my friend, ever since I can remember."

"Then you are right to think well of him—but you must let me have my opinion in peace, even although you are of his blood and I am——nothing to him. Good-bye. Forgive me if I have been ungracious and ungrateful. I have no doubt you meant well by me—only I would so much rather be let alone. It did me no good to see Lady Cheriton yesterday. My heart was tortured by the memories her face recalled."

She gave him her hand, the thin white hand, with taper fingers worn by constant work. It was a very pretty hand, and it lay in his strong grasp to-day for the first time, so reserved had been her former greetings and farewells. He looked at the delicate hand for a moment or two before he let it go, and from the hand upwards to the fair, finely-cut face, and the large, dark grey eyes. That look of his startled her, the hollow cheeks flushed, and the eyelids fell beneath his steady gaze.

"Good-bye, Mercy," he said, gently, "let me call you Mercy, for the sake of the link between us—the link of common recollections, and the sad secrets of the past."

"Call me what you like. It is not very probable we shall meet often."

"You are very stubborn, cruel to yourself, and more cruel to those who want to help you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she echoed, almost in a whisper.

He went out into the shabby street haunted by those sad uplifted eyes, and the hollow cheeks faintly flushed with delicate bloom. How lovely she must have been in her dawning womanhood, and how closely she must have kept at home in the cottage by the west gate, seeing that he who had been so frequent a guest at Cheriton had never once met her there!

He was not satisfied to submit to this total failure of his mission without one further effort. He went from Hercules Buildings to Wedgewood Street, and saw his admirable Sarah Newton, into whose attentive ear he poured the story of Mercy's obstinacy.

"She is a strange girl—a girl who could live in closest friendship with me all this time, and never tell me the secret of her past life," said Miss Newton thoughtfully. "Why she should be so perverse

in her refusal of Lord Cheriton's offer I can't imagine—but you may depend she has a reason."

Theodore escorted Lady Cheriton back to Dorsetshire by the afternoon train, but they parted company at Wareham Station, he going on to Dorchester, where his sisters received him with some wonderment at his restlessness.

"It is rather a farce for you and Mr. Ramsay to make engagements which you never intend to keep," said Sophia peevishly; and it was thereupon expounded to him that he and his friend had pledged themselves to be present at a certain tennis party upon the previous afternoon.

"I'm very sorry we both forgot all about it," he apologized, "but I don't suppose we were missed."

"I don't suppose you would have been," answered his sister sulkily, "if there had been half a dozen decent young men at the party; but as Harrington preferred the office to our society or our friends, and as there were only three curates and one banker's clerk at Mrs. Hazledean's, you and Mr. Ramsay would at least have been *something*."

"It is hardly worth any man's while to endure an afternoon's boredom—to fetch and carry teacups in a sweltering sun, and play tennis upon an unlevel lawn, if he is only to count for *something*, a mere make-weight."

"Oh, you young men give yourselves such abominable airs nowadays," retorted Sophy, with a manner which implied that the young men of former generations had been modesty incarnate. "As for your friend, he has made a mere convenience of this house."

"As how, Sophy?"

"I don't think the fact requires explanation. First he goes to the Priory, and then to Cheriton, and then he is off to London, and then he is to be back on Saturday in order to lunch at the Priory on Sunday. If that is not making an hotel of your father's house I don't know what is."

"Perhaps I have been too unceremonious, forgetting that I no longer live here, that it behoves me now, perhaps, to act in all things as a visitor. It was I who made the engagements, Sophy. You must not be angry with Ramsay."

"I am not angry. It cannot matter to me how Mr. Ramsay treats this house. No doubt he thinks himself a great deal too clever for our society, although we are not *quite* so feather-headed as most girls. He finds metal more attractive at the Priory."

"What do you mean, Sophy?"

"That he is over head and ears in love with Juanita. It does not need a very penetrating person to discover that."

"What nonsense! Why, he has not seen her above three times."

"Quite enough for a young man of his vehement character."

"What can have put such an idea into your head?"

"His way of talking about her—the expression of his face when he pronounces her name—the questions he asked me about her, showing the keenest interest in even the silliest details. What kind of a girl was she before she married, and how long had she known Sir Godfrey before they were engaged, and had their love been a grand passion full of romance and poetry, or only a humdrum kind of affection encouraged by their mutual relations? Idiotic questions of that kind could only be asked by a man who was in love. And then how eagerly he snapped at your suggestion that he should go with you to the Priory next Sunday."

"It may be as you think," Theodore answered gravely. "I know his fervid temperament about most things; but I did not think he was the kind of man to fall in love—upon such very slight provocation."

"She may have given more encouragement than you suppose," said Sophy. "He is the kind of man that a frivolous, half-educated girl would think attractive. *She* would never find out the want of depth under that arrogant, self-assured manner. However, she has asked Janet and me for next Sunday, and I shall soon see how the land lies. You were always unobservant."

Theodore did not try to vindicate his character as an observer, albeit he knew no look or tone of his cousin's was likely to escape him; that even sharp-eyed malevolence could never watch her more closely than love would watch out of his eyes.

Yes; it was not unlikely that Cuthbert admired her too much for his own peace. He recalled words which had passed unnoticed when they were together. Poor Cuthbert! He felt he had done wrong in exposing his friend to such an ordeal. Who could know her and not love her?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"For life must life, and blood must blood repay."

CUTHBERT RAMSAY arrived at Dorchester on Saturday just in time to dress for dinner, and he contrived to make himself so agreeable to all the family in the course of that friendly meal, that Janet and Sophia forgave him for his base desertion, and Harrington forgave him for being a great deal cleverer and happier than himself. He was in very high spirits—had been working hard in London—attending lectures—witnessing operations—and looking after those gratis patients in the slums who were his chief delight.

"I love to find out what life means below the surface," he said. "One only gets at realities when one comes face to face with the struggle for existence. The children—the poor pinched atomies whom one looks at with a shudder, remembering that *they* are the men and women of the future! That is the terrible point—to think that in those little half-starved faces one sees the men who are to meet in Trafalgar Square and unmake our smooth, easy world—to think that in those wizened morsels of humanity we have all the elements of discord and destruction in the days to come. *That* is the appalling thought."

"It is a thought that should teach us our duty to them," said Janet.

"What do you take that duty to be?"

"To educate them!"

"Educate—yes—educate them in the ways of health and cleanliness—after we have fed them. *That* I take to be our primary duty to the children as much as to the lower animals. You know the old adage, Miss Dalbrook, *mens sana in corpore sano*. Did you ever hear of a sound and healthy mind in an unsound scrofulous body? So long as we leave the little children to semi-starvation, we are sacrificing to the Demon Scrofula, which is to our enlightened age what the Demon Leprosy was to those darker ages whose ignorance we prate about."

"I am not in favour of pauperizing the working classes," said Harrington.

"That idea of pauperism is a bugbear and a stumbling-block in the path of benevolence. Do you pauperize an agricultural labourer

whose utmost wages are fifteen shillings a week if you provide his children with two good meals of fresh meat in the seven days, and so grow better bone and sinew than can be produced upon bread and dripping, or bread and treacle? Do you pauperize a man by giving him a free supply of pure water, and larger, airier rooms than his scanty wages will buy for him? To subsidize is not to pauperize, Mr. Dalbrook; and if England is to hold together upon the old lines during the coming centuries, the well-to-do will have to help the poor upon a stronger and wider basis than that on which they have helped them in the past, and a good deal of the spare cash that is now being spent on fine clothes and dinner-parties will have to be spent upon feeding and housing the million."

The two young men drove over to Milbrook early on Sunday morning, in order to attend morning service at the picturesque old church. Matthew Dalbrook and his daughters were to join them at the Priory in time for luncheon, which was to be a regular family party.

Cuthbert was silent for the greater part of the drive, and Theodore was thoughtfully observant of him. Yes, there might be something in Sophy's idea. More than once during that long drive the young man's face brightened with a sudden smile, a smile of ineffable happiness, as of a dreaming lover who sees the gates of his earthly paradise opening, sees his mistress coming to meet him on the threshold. Theodore's heart sank at the thought that Sophia had hit upon the truth. Anyway there was hopelessness in the idea. If it were to be Theodore's blessed fate to see the one love of his life victorious, soon or late, after long patience and devoted sacrifice, Cuthbert must taste the bitterness of having loved in vain. But he would hardly be worthy of pity, perhaps, seeing that he had known from the first how the land lay, seeing that honour forbade his falling in love with Juanita.

But will honour make a man blind to beauty, deaf to the music of a voice, impervious to the subtle charms of all that is purest, best, and loveliest in womanhood? Theodore began to think that he had done wrong in bringing his friend within the influence of irresistible charms.

"I was a fool to think that he could help himself; I was a worse fool to suppose that she will ever care for me—the humdrum cousin whom she has known all her life—the country solicitor whose image she has always associated with leases and bills of dilapidation—a little more than a bailiff, and a little less than a gentleman."

They consigned the dog-cart to the village ostler, who was expiating the jovial self-indulgence of Saturday night in the penitential drowsiness of Sunday morning, and they were in their places in the grey old church when Lady Carmichael came to the chancel pew. Theodore's watchful eyes followed her from her entrance in a halo

of sunshine, which was suddenly obscured as the curtain dropped behind her, to the moment when she bowed her head in prayer. He saw her face brighten as she passed the pew where he and his friend were sitting, and he told himself that it was Cuthbert's presence which conjured up that happier light in her soft, dark eyes. On the walk from the church to the Priory it was with Cuthbert she talked—Cuthbert the irrepressible, who had so much to say that he must needs find listeners. It was Cuthbert who sat next her at luncheon, and who engrossed her attention throughout the meal. It was Cuthbert who went through the hot-houses, fern-houses, and greenhouses with her after luncheon, and gave her practical lessons in botany and entomology as they went along, and who promised her some Austrian frogs. The day was one long triumph for Cuthbert Ramsay, and he gave himself up to the intoxication of the hour as a drunkard surrenders to strong drink, unconditionally, without thought of the morrow.

"What do you think of your friend's infatuation *now*?" asked Janet, with her most biting accent, as she and Theodore followed in the horticultural procession, she carefully picking up her gown at every one of those treacherous puddles which are to be found in the best-regulated hot-houses. "Have you any doubt in your mind now?"

"No. I have no doubt."

The carriages were at the door half an hour afterwards, and all through the homeward drive Cuthbert was silent as the grave. Only as they came into Dorchester did he find speech to say,—

"I shall have to go back to town early to-morrow morning, Theodore!"

"So soon. What an unquiet spirit you are! You'll come back to us next Friday or Saturday, I hope."

"I don't know. I'll try; but I'm rather afraid I can't."

Theodore did not press the point, and his friend kept his word, and left by the first train on Monday morning, after having been intolerably stupid on Sunday evening, according to the sisters, who were disposed to think themselves especially ill-used by Mr. Ramsay's obvious infatuation for Lady Carmichael.

"I was beginning to respect Juanita for her conduct in the difficult position of a young widow," said Sophia; "but I begin to fear that she is no better than the rest of them, and that her leaving off crape upon her last gowns is a sign that she means to marry again before the second year of her widowhood is over."

Lady Cheriton's roses were in danger from a failure of the water in that old-fashioned well which had hitherto supplied the flower-gardens. There had been an unusually long spell of dry weather since the beginning of July, and the gardeners were in despair.

When Theodore went over to the Chase with his portmanteau, in accordance with an engagement made the previous week, he found that Lord Cheriton had that morning given an order for the sinking of the old well from twenty to thirty feet deeper.

"There is plenty of water, my lord," said the head gardener, "if we only go deep enough for it."

"Very well, Mackenzie, go as deep as you like, so long as you don't go below the water-bearing strata. You had better put on plenty of hands. Her ladyship is uneasy about her roses, seeing how you have been stinting them lately."

"It has been hard work, my lord, to do our duty by the roses, and keep the lawns in decent order. The ground would be as hard as iron if we didn't use a good deal of water for the grass."

"Get to work, Mackenzie, and don't waste time in talking about it. Drive over to Gadby's, and tell him to send some good men."

This conversation took place upon the terrace directly after Theodore's arrival; and when the gardener had gone off to the stables to get the dog-cart-of-all-work, Lord Cheriton and his cousin walked in the direction of the well.

The well was in one of the kitchen-gardens, quite the oldest bit of garden ground at Cheriton, a square garden of about two acres, shut in with high crumbling old red-brick walls, upon which grew blue gages and William pears, egg-plums and apricots, attaining more or less to perfection as the aspect favoured them. It was a pleasant garden to dream in upon a summer afternoon, for there was an air of superabundant growth that was almost tropical in the century-old espaliers, albeit they had long ceased to produce meritorious fruit, and in the sprawling leaves and yellow blossoms of the vegetable marrows which seemed to be grown for no purpose except to produce champion gourds or pumpkins, to be ultimately hung up as ornaments in the gardener's cottage, or to rot in a corner of the greenhouse. There is always one old greenhouse in such a garden given over to preserving spiders and accumulating rubbish.

In the middle of a vegetable marrow warren stood the well—a well of eight feet in diameter, surrounded by a low brick wall, of that same bright red brick which crumbled behind the blue gages and the egg-plums, and which the birds pecked and perforated, for very wantonness. It was a well of the old pattern, with a ponderous wooden roller, and an iron spindle, which had wound up water from those same cool depths for over a hundred years. It had run dry often, in the time of the Strangways, that good old well; but no Strangway had ever thought of improving anything upon the estate; so in seasons of drought the flowers had drooped and the turf had withered unheeded by the proprietorial eye.

Mr. Gadby's men appeared after their dinner, and got seriously to work by about three o'clock, at which hour Theodore and Lady Cheriton were strolling in the rose garden, while the master of the house sat in the library reading. Theodore had observed a marked change in his cousin since his last visit to the Chase. There was a worried look in Lord Cheriton's face which had not been there even after the shock of the murder, a look of nervous apprehension which showed itself from time to time in a countenance where firmness of character and an absolute fearlessness had been hitherto the strongest characteristics.

He had not yet told his lordship the result of his interview with Mercy Porter. He had waited till an opportunity for quiet, confidential talk should come about naturally, and that opportunity now occurred. Lady Cheriton left him after half an hour's review of the roses, and he went through the open window into the library where Lord Cheriton sat in his large arm-chair at his own particular table, reading the political summing-up in the last *Quarterly*.

"Shall I be disturbing you if I sit here?" asked Theodore, taking a volume from the table where the newest books were always to be found.

"On the contrary, I shall be very glad of a little conversation. I have been struggling through an analysis of last session, which is all weariness and vexation of spirit. The session was dull, the commentary is duller. I am anxious to know how you got on with Mrs. Porter's daughter."

"Very badly, I regret to say, from our point of view. She rejects your generous offer. She prefers her present hard life, with its independence. She will accept no obligation from any one."

"Humph! She must be a curious young woman," said Lord Cheriton, with a vexed air. "I should have liked very much to have made her life bright and easy, if she would have let me—for her father's sake. On what ground did she refuse my offer?"

"On the ground of preferring to work for her living, and to live a hard life. She has taken that upon herself, I believe, as an expiation for her past errors, although she did not say that in so many words. She is wonderfully firm. I never saw such a resolute temper in so young—and so gentle-mannered—a woman."

"You tried to overcome her objections, you represented to her how easy and pleasant her life might be in some picturesque village—among the hills and lakes, or by the sea—and how she might live among people who would know nothing of her past history, who would grow to be fond of her for her own sake?"

"I urged all this upon her. I am as anxious as you are that she should leave that dreary attic—that monotonous labour—but nothing I could say was of the least use. She was resolute—she would accept nothing from you."

"From me—ah, that is it!" cried Lord Cheriton, suddenly. "Had the offer come from any one else she might have been less stubborn. But from *me* she will take nothing—not a loaf of bread if she were starving. That is the explanation of her hardness—it is to me she is adamant. Tell me the truth, Theodore. Don't spare my feelings. This girl hates me, I suppose!"

"I fear she has a deeply-rooted prejudice against you. She may—most unjustly—blame you for her misery, because Colonel Tremayne was your friend."

"Yes, that is her feeling, no doubt; it is on that account she hates me. Perhaps she is justified in her anger. I ought to have shot that scoundrel. Had we both lived fifty years sooner I suppose I should have shot him."

"I don't think you could have been called upon to do that even by the old code of honour. Mercy was not allied to you——"

"No; but she dwelt at my gates. She was under my protection—she had no other man living to defend her. I ought to have punished her seducer—it was incumbent on me to do it. Because there was no one else," he added slowly, after a long pause.

"It may be on that account she rejects your generous offer. I cannot pretend to interpret her feelings; but there was certainly some strong personal prejudice on her part. She was deeply moved. She burst into a passion of sobs. 'Not from him,' she cried, 'I will accept nothing from him. Of all the men upon this earth he shall be the last to help me!'"

Lord Cheriton flung the *Quarterly* from him with a passionate gesture, as he started to his feet and began to walk up and down the long clear space in front of the windows.

"Theodore," he said suddenly, "you have not yet come face to face with all the problems of life. Perhaps you have not yet found out how hard it is to help people. I would have given much to be able to help that girl—to assure her an easy and reputable existence—the refinements of life amidst pleasant surroundings. What would it matter to me whether I allowed her one hundred or two hundred a year? All I desire is that her life should be happy. And of deliberate malice—of sheer perversity—she rejects my help, she dooms herself to the seamstress' slavery, and to a garret in Lambeth. My God, to think that with all the will and all the power to help her, I cannot come between her and that sordid misery. It is hard, Theodore, it is very hard upon a man like me. There is nothing I hold of this world's goods that I have not worked for honestly; and when I want to do good for others with what I have won, I am barred by their folly. It is enough to make me mad."

Never before had Theodore seen this self-abandonment in his stately cousin, the man who bore in every tone and every gesture

the impress of his acknowledged ascendency over his fellow-men. To see such a man as this so completely unhinged by a woman's perversity was a new thing to Theodore Dalbrook; and his heart went out to his kinsman as it had never done before.

"My dear Cheriton, you have done all that was in your power to do for that mistaken young woman," he said, holding out his hand, which the elder man grasped warmly. "Whatever wrong you may have unwittingly brought about by the presence of a blackguard under your roof, you have done your best to atone for that wrong. The most sensitive, the most punctilious of men could do no more."

"I thank you, Theodore, for your sympathy. Yes, I have done my best for her—you will bear witness to that."

"A father could scarcely do more for an erring daughter. I only wish her mother felt half as kindly towards her as you, upon whom her claim is so slight."

"No, no; it is a substantial claim. She is fatherless, and her mother is dependent upon me. I stand, as it were, *in loco parentis*. Well, we will say no more about her; she must go her own way. Only, if ever you find an opportunity of helping her—for me, you will do me a great favour by taking prompt advantage of it."

"I shall gladly do so. I am interested in her for her own sake, as well as for yours."

"You are a good fellow, Theodore, and I know you wish us well. I will go a step further than that and say I know that I can trust you."

This was said with an earnestness which impressed Theodore. It seemed to him almost as if his kinsman foresaw that inevitable hour in which there must be perfect unreserve between them—in which the younger man would have to say to his senior and superior in rank, "I know the secret of your earlier years. I know the dark cloud that has overshadowed your life."

They talked for a little while of indifferent subjects, and then Lord Cheriton proposed a stroll in the direction of the well.

"I should like to see whether those fellows have begun work," he said.

The old garden looked its sleepiest in the westering sunlight, but there was business going on there nevertheless, and a great heap of damp clay had been flung out by the side of the low brick parapet. Two men were at work below, and there were two men above, while a fifth, a foreman and leading light, looked on and gave directions.

"Glad to see you've tackled the job, Carter," said Lord Cheriton.

"Yes, my lord, we've got on to it pretty well. Could I have a word with your lordship?"

"Certainly, as many words as you like. How mysterious you

look, Carter! There is nothing in your communication that Mr. Dalbrook is not to hear, I suppose?"

"No, my lord, Mr. Dalbrook don't matter; but I thought you wouldn't care for everybody to know, lest it should get round to her ladyship, and give her a scare."

"What are you driving at, Carter, with your ladyships and your scares? Have you seen a ghost at the bottom of the well?"

"No, my lord, but the men found this in the surface clay, and I thought it might have some bearing upon—last year—the murder."

He dropped out his words hesitatingly, as if he hardly dared approach that ghastly theme, and then took something out of his jacket pocket, and handed it to Lord Cheriton.

It was a Colt's revolver, by no means of the newest make, rusted by lying long under water. The foreman had amused his leisure since the discovery in trying to rub off the rust with a large cotton handkerchief, assisted by his corduroy coat-sleeve, and had succeeded in polishing a small silver plate upon the butt of the pistol so as to make the initials "T. D." engraved upon it easily decipherable.

There was not much in the discovery perhaps; but by the ghastly change in Lord Cheriton's face Theodore saw that to him at least it appeared of fatal significance. His hand shook as it held the pistol, his eyes had a look of absolute horror as they scrutinized it; and nothing could be more obvious than the effort with which he controlled his agitation, and looked from the builder's foreman to Theodore with an assumption of tranquillity.

"It may mean much, or nothing, Carter," he said, putting the pistol in his coat pocket. "It was quite right of you to bring the matter before me."

"I thought the initials on the pistol might lead to something being found out, my lord," said the foreman. "I don't think there can be much doubt the murderer chucked it in there."

"Don't you? I have gone into the subject of circumstantial evidence a little deeper than you have, Carter; it was my trade, don't you know, just as laying bricks was yours, and I can tell you that the odds are ten to one against this pistol having belonged to the murderer. Do you think it likely that the man who shot Sir Godfrey Carmichael would have gone out of his way to throw his pistol down that particular well?"

"I don't know about that, my lord; it would have been a safe hiding-place, if the water hadn't given out—and it would be in his way if he were making for the West Gate. He could hardly have taken a shorter cut than across this garden."

"Perhaps not—if both the garden doors were open that night."

"I don't think anybody ever saw them shut, my lord, night or day," answered Carter, with respectful persistency.

Theodore knew by the very look of the clumsy wooden doors, pushed back against the old wall, with rusty hinges, and with the tendrils of vine or plum tree growing over their edges, that the man was right. The path across this garden and the next garden led in a direct line to the West Lodge, and it was this way by which the servants went on most of their errands to the village.

The one idea suggested by the choice of that hiding-place was that the person who threw away that pistol was familiar with the premises. The well was about thirty feet away from the path, and screened by the old espaliers. There was a gap in the espaliers where an ancient and cankered apple tree had been taken out, and it was by this opening that the gardeners generally went to draw water. They had trodden a hard foot-track in their going and coming.

It was always possible that a stranger exploring the grounds furtively and in haste might have been sharp enough to hit upon the well as a safe and handy hiding-place. It would, of course, have been vital to the murderer to get rid of his weapon as soon as possible after the deed was done, lest he should be taken red-handed and with that piece of evidence upon him.

Theodore saw in that pistol with the initials "T. D.," confirmatory evidence against the husband of Mrs. Danvers, the one person in the world who had ground for an undying hatred of Lord Cheriton and his race. He made no remark upon the discovery of the weapon, fearing to say too much; and he waited quietly to see how his kinsman would act in the matter. That ghastly change in Lord Cheriton's countenance as he examined the pistol, suggested that he had come to the same conclusion as Theodore. Remorse and horror could hardly have been more plainly expressed by the human countenance; and what remorse could be more terrible than that of the man who saw the sin of his youth visited upon his innocent daughter?

"Shall you take any steps with reference to this discovery?" asked Theodore, when they had gone half-way back to the house in absolute silence.

"What steps can I take, do you think? Send for another London detective—or for the same man again—and give him this pistol? To what end? He would be no nearer finding the murderer because of the finding of the pistol."

"The initials might lead to identification."

"Did you never hear of such a thing as a second-hand pistol? And do you think an assassin would make use of a pistol with his own initials upon it to commit murder? I do not."

"Not the professional assassin. But we are all agreed that this

murder was an act of vengeance—for some reason at present unknown—and the semi-lunatic who would commit murder for such a motive would not be likely to do his work very neatly. His brain would be fevered by passion or alcohol, in all probability, and he would go to work blindly."

"That is no more than a theory, and my experience has shown me that such theories are generally falsified by fact. The murder was so far neatly done that the murderer got clear off, in spite of a most rigorous search. I doubt if the pistol, with initials which may belong to anybody in the world, will help us to track him after more than a year."

"Then you mean to do nothing in the matter?"

"I think not. I cannot see my way to doing anything at present; but if you like to take the pistol to Scotland Yard and see what impression it makes upon the experts there——"

"I should much like to do so. I cannot ignore the fact that so long as Sir Godfrey's murderer remains undiscovered, there is a possibility of peril for you and for Juanita, and for Juanita's child. Who can tell whether that deadly hatred is appeased—whether the man who killed your daughter's husband is not on the watch to kill you or your daughter—when he sees his opportunity?"

"As for myself, I must take my chance. I would to God that the ball had struck me instead of my son-in-law. It would have been better—a lighter chastisement. I have lived my life. I have done all I ever hoped to do in this world. A few years, more or less, could matter very little to me. And yet, life is sweet, Theodore, life is sweet! However heavily we are handicapped, we most of us would choose to finish our race."

There was infinite melancholy in his tone, the melancholy of a man who sees the shadows of a great despair darkening round him, the melancholy of a man who gives up the contest of life, and feels that he is beaten.

"Do not say anything to my wife about this business," he said; "let her be happy as long as she can. She has not forgotten last summer, but she is beginning to be something like what she was before that blow fell upon us. The advent of Juanita's baby has worked wonders. There is something to look forward to in that child's existence. Life is no longer a cul-de-sac."

"There is one thing to be done," said Theodore, after an interval of silence. "The bullet was kept, of course."

"Yes, it is in the possession of the police, I believe."

"Would it not be well to ascertain if it fits the pistol you have in your pocket?"

"Yes. I will go to the station to-morrow and look into that."

There was no more said about the pistol that evening. Theodore felt that it would be cruelty to dwell upon the subject, seeing that

his kinsman had been deeply affected by the discovery, and that he was oppressed by a gloom which he strove in vain to shake off.

It was evident to Theodore that those initials on the pistol had a terrible meaning for Lord Cheriton, that he recognized in those initials the evidence of an injured husband's vengeance, a hatred which had been undiminished by the lapse of years.

He told himself that the tardiness of that revenge might be accounted for by various contingencies, any one of which would lessen the improbability of that long interval between the wrong done and the retribution exacted. It might be that the murderer had been an exile in a distant world. It might be that he had been a criminal fretting himself against the bars of a felon's prison, nursing his anger in the dull, dead days of penal servitude. Such things have been.

It was clear to Theodore Dalbrook that in those initials upon the Colt's revolver lay the clue to the murderer, and that Lord Cheriton shrank with horror from the revelation which those two letters might bring about. Yet, whatever evil might come upon the master of Cheriton out of the secret past, it was vital that the murderer should be found, lest his second crime should be more hideous than his first; and Theodore was resolved that he would spare no effort in the endeavour to find him, living or dead.

"God grant that I may find a grave rather than the living man," he thought, "for Cheriton's sake. God grant that he may be spared the humiliation of having his story told to all the world."

He went into Cheriton village early upon the following afternoon, and dropped in upon the doctor, an old inhabitant, whose father and grandfather before him had prescribed for all the parish, rich and poor. Mr. Dolby, *par excellence* Dr. Dolby, was a bachelor, a spare, sharp-visaged man of about forty, social and expansive, a keen sportsman, and a good billiard player, a man whose lines had been set in pleasant places, for he had inherited a roomy old cottage, with capacious stabling, and twenty acres of the fattest meadow-land in Cheriton parish, and he led exactly that kind of life which his soul loved. It would have been no gain to such a man to have changed places with Baron Rothschild or Lord Salisbury. He would have been in all that constitutes human happiness a loser by such an exchange. So cheery a person was naturally popular in a narrow world like Cheriton, and Mr. Dolby was a general favourite, a favourite in polite society, and in the billiard-room at the Cheriton Arms, which, in default of a club, served as the afternoon and evening rendezvous for lawyer, doctor, and the tenant-farmers of a gentlemanly class—the smock-frock farmers and tradespeople having their own particular meeting place at the Old House at Home, a public-house at the other end of the village. Theodore had known Mr. Dolby from his childhood, and the medical adviser of Cheriton

was an occasional dropper-in at the luncheon table in Cornhill, when business transactions with his tailor or his banker took him to the county town. There was nothing unusual, therefore, in Theodore's afternoon call at Dovecotes, a somewhat picturesque name which had been given to the doctor's domicile by his predecessor, who had devoted his later years to an ardent cultivation of Barbs and Jacobins and other aristocratic birds, and who had covered a quarter of an acre of garden ground with pigeon-houses of various construction.

Theodore found Mr. Dolby smoking his afternoon pipe in the seclusion of his surgery. He had made a long morning round, had driven something between twenty and thirty miles, and considered himself entitled to what he called his otium cum whisky and water, which refreshment stood on a small table at his elbow while he lolled in his capacious easy chair.

He welcomed his visitor with effusion, and insisted on calling for another syphon, and having another little table arranged at the elbow of the other easy chair.

"Make yourself comfortable, old chap, and let us have a jaw," he said. "I haven't seen you for ages. Are you at the Chase?"

They talked of the usual village topics, glanced at the great world of politics, speculated upon the prospects of the shooting season, and then Theodore approached the real business of his visit.

"There is a fellow I am interested in from a business point of view," he began, "who has been hanging about this place, off and on, for the last five and twenty years, I believe, though I have never happened to meet him. He is a drinking man, and altogether a bad lot; but it is my business to hunt him down."

"On account of some property, I suppose?"

"Yes, on account of some property. Now, I know what an observer you are, Dolby, and what a wonderful memory you have——"

"I haven't wasted it up in London," interjected Dolby. "A week in Oxford Street and the Strand would take ten years off my memory. It's pretty clear at present, thank God. Well, now, what about this fellow, what kind of a fellow is he—a gentleman or a cad?"

"He was once a gentleman, but he may have tumbled pretty low by this time. He was going down hill at a good pace five and twenty years ago."

"Egad, then he must be at the bottom of the hill, I take it. What is he like—fat or lean, dark or fair, short or tall?"

"A tall man, fair complexion, a man who has once been handsome, a showy-looking man," answered Theodore, quoting the house-agent.

"That will do. Yes, just such a man as that was at the Arms one night—six—eight—upon my word I believe it must have been ten years ago. A man who put on a good deal of side, though his clothes were no end seedy—ragged edges to his trousers, don't you know—and though his hand shook like an aspen leaf. I played a fifty game with him, and I should say, though I beat him easy, that he had once been a fine player. He was in wretched form, poor creature, but——"

"Ten years ago, do you really think it was as long ago you saw him?"

"I know it was. It would be in seventy-four, that was the year Potter was returned for Screwmouth. I remember we were all talking of the election the night that fellow was there. Yes, I remember him perfectly; a tall, fair man, a wreck, but with the traces of former good looks. I fancy he must have been a soldier. He slept at the Arms that night, and I met him rather early next morning, before nine o'clock, coming away from the Chase—met him within ten yards of the West Lodge."

"Did he talk about Lord Cheriton?"

"A good deal—talked rather wild, too—and would have blackguarded your cousin if we hadn't shut him up pretty sharply. He pretended to have been intimate with him before he made his way at the Bar, and he talked in the venomous way a man who has been a failure very often does talk about a man who has been a success. It's only human nature, I suppose. There's a spice of venom in human nature."

"Have you never seen this man at Cheriton since that occasion—never within the last ten years?"

"Never, and I should be inclined, looking at the gentleman from a professional point of view, to believe that he must have been under the turf for a considerable portion of that period. I don't think there could have been three years' life in the man I played billiards with that evening. Hard lines for him, poor beggar, if there was property coming to him. He looked as if he wanted it bad enough."

"What had he been doing at the Chase, do you suppose?"

"I haven't the least idea. I was driving in my cart when I passed him. I looked back and watched him for two or three minutes. He was walking very slowly, and with a languid air, like a man who was not used to walking. Ten years—no, Theodore—I don't think it's possible such a shaky subject as that could have lasted ten years. One certainly does see very miserable creatures crawling on for years after they have been ticketed for the undertaker—but this man—no—I don't think he could hold out long after that October morning. I fancy he was booked for a quick passage."

"He may have pulled himself together, and turned over a new leaf."

"Too old, and too far gone for that."

"Or what if he had done something bad and got himself shut up for a few years?"

"Penal servitude do you mean? Well, that might do something! It's a very severe regimen for the habitual drunkard—and it means kill or cure. In this case I should say decidedly kill."

"But it might cure."

"I should think the chances of cure were as two in two hundred. I won't say it would be impossible, not having examined the patient—but so far as observation can teach a man anything, observation taught me that the case was hopeless."

"And yet it is my belief that this man was at Cheriton some time last year. You know everybody, and talk to everybody, my dear Dolby. I wish you'd find out for me whether I am right?"

"I'll do my best," answered Mr. Dolby cheerfully. "If the man has been seen by anybody in the village I ought to be able to hear about him. Everybody was tremendously on the look-out last year, after the murder, and no stranger could have escaped observation."

"Perhaps not—but before the murder——"

"Anybody who had been seen shortly before the murder would have been remembered and talked about. You can have no idea of the intense excitement that event caused among us. We seemed to talk of nothing else, and to think of nothing else for months."

"And you suppose that if the man I want had been about—for a few hours only, just long enough to come and go away again on that fatal night, he would have been remembered?"

"I am sure of it. He would have inevitably been taken for the murderer. Remember, we were all on the alert, ready to fix upon the first suspicious-looking person our memory could suggest to us."

"Do you think Johnson would remember the man?"

Johnson was the proprietor of the Cheriton Arms.

"My dear fellow, did you ever find Johnson's memory available about any transaction six months old? Johnson's memory is steeped in beer, buried in flesh. Johnson is a perambulating barrel of forgetfulness—a circumambulatory hogshead of stupidity. Ask Johnson to tell you the Christian name of his grandmother, and I would venture a new hat he would be unable to answer you. There is nothing to be got out of mine host of the Cheriton Arms. Be sure of that."

"I'm afraid you are right," said Theodore.

He felt as if he had come to a point at which there was no thoroughfare. There was the pistol, with the initials "T. D.," and

he had made up his mind that the man for whom those initials had been engraved was the man who gave his name as Danvers when he called upon the house-agent, the man whose wife had been known for years as Mrs. Danvers. He had made up his mind that this man and no other had murdered Godfrey Carmichael—that many years after the wife's death the husband had returned from exile or imprisonment, embittered so much the more, so much the more vindictive, so much the more malignant for all that he had suffered in that interval, and had taken the first opportunity to attack a hated household. That he would strike again if he should be allowed to live and be at large Theodore had no doubt. A second murder, and a third murder, seemed the natural sequence of the first. He remembered the murders of the Jermys at Stanfield Hall—the savage hatred which tried to slay four people, two of whom were utterly unconnected with the wrong that called for vengeance. In the face of such a story as that of the murderer Rush, who could say that Theodore's apprehension of an insatiable malignity, wreaking itself in further bloodshed, was groundless?

He left Dovecotes disheartened, hardly knowing what his next step was to be, and very hopeless of tracking a man who had so contrived as to be unseen upon his deadly errand. He must have come and gone verily like a thief in the night, sheltered by darkness, meeting no one; and yet there was the evidence of the servants at the inquest, who swore to having heard mysterious footsteps outside the house late at night upon more than one occasion shortly before the murder. If the murderer had been about upon several nights, creeping round by the open windows of the reception rooms, watching his opportunity, what had he done with himself in the day? Where had he hidden himself; how had he evaded the prying eyes of a village, which is all eyes, all ears for the unexplained stranger?

CHAPTER XXIX.

"When haughty expectations prostrate lie
And grandeur crouches like a guilty thing."

THEODORE walked moodily along the lane leading to the West Gate, brooding over discrepancies and difficulties in the case which he had set himself to unravel. As he drew near Mrs. Porter's cottage he saw Lord Cheriton come out of the porch, unattended. He came slowly down the steps to the gate, with his head bent, and his shoulders stooping wearily, an attitude which was totally unlike his usual erect carriage, an attitude which told distinctly of mental trouble.

Theodore overtook him, and walked by his side, at the risk of being considered intrusive. He was very curious as to his kinsman's motive for visiting Mrs. Porter, after yesterday's conversation about Mercy.

"Have you been trying to bring about a reconciliation between mother and daughter?" he asked.

"No. I have told you that little good could result from bringing those two obstinate spirits together. You have seen for yourself what the daughter can be—how perverse, how cruel, what a creature of prejudice and whim. The mother's nature is still harder. What good could come of bringing such a daughter back to such a mother? No, it was with no hope of reconciliation that I called upon Mrs. Porter. I have been thinking very seriously of your friend Ramsay's suggestion of mental trouble. I regret that I did not act upon the hint sooner, and get my friend Mainwaring to see her, and advise upon the case. I shall certainly consult him about her—but as he has a very important practice, and a large establishment under his care, it may be very difficult for him to come to Cheriton. I think, therefore, it might be well to send her up to the neighbourhood of London—to some quiet northern suburb, for instance, within half an hour's drive of Mainwaring's asylum, which is near Cheshunt; then, if it should be deemed advisable to place her under restraint for a time—though I cannot suppose that likely—the business could be easily accomplished.

"Your idea then would be——"

"To take her up to London, with her servant, as soon as I have found comfortable lodgings for her in a quiet neighbourhood. I have

proposed the journey to her this afternoon, on the ground of her being out of health and in need of special advice. I told her that people had remarked upon her altered appearance, and that I was anxious she should have the best medical care. She did not deny that she was ailing. I think, therefore, there will be very little difficulty in getting her away when I am ready to remove her."

"What is your own impression as to her mental condition?"

"I regret to say that my impression very much resembles that of your friend. I see a great change in her since I last had any conversation with her. Yes, I fear that there is something amiss, and that it is no longer well for her to live in that cottage, with a young girl for her only companion. It would be far better for her to be in a private asylum—where, hers being a very mild case, life might be made easy and agreeable for her. I know my friend Mainwaring to be a man of infinite benevolence, and that there would be nothing wanting to lighten her burden."

He sighed heavily. There was a look in his face of unutterable care, of a despondency which saw no issue, no ray of light far off in the thickening gloom. Theodore thought he looked aged by several years since yesterday, as if the evidence of the pistol had struck him to the heart.

"He knows now that it was his own sin that brought about this evil," thought Theodore.

He could conceive the agony of the father's heart, knowing that for his own wrong-doing his innocent daughter had been called upon to make so terrible an expiation. He could penetrate into the dark recesses of the sinner's mind, where remorse for that early error, and for all the false steps which it had necessitated, dominated every other thought. Till yesterday James Dalbrook might have supposed his sin a thing of the past, atoned for and forgiven—its evil consequences suffered in the past, the account ruled off in the book of fate, and the acquittance given. To-day he knew that his sin had cost him his daughter's happiness; and over and above that horror of the past there lay before him the hazard of some still greater horror in the future. Could anybody wonder that his eyes were sunken and dull, as they never had been before within Theodore's memory? Could anybody wonder at the strained look in the broad, open forehead, beneath which the eyes looked out wide apart under strongly-marked brows; or at the hard lines about the mouth, which told of sharpest mental pain?

Late that evening, when Lady Cheriton had gone to bed, Theodore approached the subject of the pistol.

"Did you compare the ball with the revolver that was found yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes. The ball fits the bore. I don't know that the fact goes

to prove much—but so far as it goes it is now in the knowledge of our local police. Unfortunately they are not the most brilliant intellects I know of."

"If you will let me have the pistol to-night before we go to bed I will go up to town by an early train to-morrow and take it to Scotland Yard, as you suggested."

"I suggested nothing of the kind, my dear Theodore. I attach very little importance to the discovery of the pistol as a means towards discovering the murderer. I said you might take it to Scotland Yard if you liked—that was all."

"I should like to do so. I should feel better satisfied——"

"Oh, satisfy yourself, by all means," interrupted Lord Cheriton irritably. "You are great upon the science of circumstantial evidence. There is the pistol," taking it out of a drawer in the large writing-table. "Do what you like with it."

"You are not offended with me I hope?"

"No, I am only tired—tired of the whole business, and of the everlasting talk there has been about it. If it is a vendetta, if the hand that killed Godfrey Carmichael is to kill me, and my daughter, and her son—if my race is to be eradicated from the face of this earth by an unappeasable hatred I cannot help my fate. I cannot parry the impending blow. Nor can you or Scotland Yard protect me from my foe, Theodore."

"Scotland Yard may find your foe and lock him up."

"I doubt it. But do as you please."

Theodore's train left Wareham at nine o'clock. There was a still earlier train at seven, by which farmers and other enterprising spirits who wanted to take time by the forelock were accustomed to travel; but to be in time for the nine o'clock train Theodore had to leave Cheriton at a quarter to eight, and to drive to the distant town in the dog-cart made and provided for station work, and drawn by one of two smart cobs kept for the purpose.

He left the park by the West Gate. He had to wait longer than usual for the opening of the gate; and when the chubby-cheeked maid-servant came down the steps with a key in her hand and unlocked the gate there was that in her manner which indicated a fluttered mind.

"Oh, if you please, sir, I'm sorry to keep you waiting so long, but I couldn't find the key just at first, though I thought I'd hung it up on the nail last night after I locked the gate—but I was so upset at my mistress leaving so suddenly—never saying a word about it beforehand—that I hardly knew what I was doing."

Theodore stopped the groom as he drove through the gate. He had a few minutes to spare, and could afford himself time to question the girl, who had a look of desiring to be interrogated.

"What is this about your mistress leaving suddenly?" he asked. "Do you mean that Mrs. Porter has gone away—on a journey."

"Yes, indeed, sir. She that never left home before since I was a child—for I've known her ever since I can remember, and never knew her to be away for so much as a single night. And the first thing this morning when I was lighting the kitchen fire she opens the door and just looks in and says—'Martha, I'm going to London. Don't expect me back till you see me. There's a letter on the parlour table,' she says. 'Let it lie there till it's called for—don't you touch it, nor yet the box,' and she shuts the kitchen door and walks off just as quietly as if she was going to early church, as she has done many a time before it was daylight. I was that upset that I knelt before the stove a good few minutes before I could realize that she was gone—and then I run out and looked after her. She was almost out of sight, walking up the lane towards Cheriton."

"Had she no luggage—did she take nothing with her?"

"Nothing. Not so much as a hand-bag."

"What time was this?"

"It struck six a few minutes after I went back to the kitchen."

"What about the letter—and the box your mistress spoke of?"

"There they are, sir, on the parlour table, where she left them. *I'm* not going to touch them," said the girl, with emphasis. "She told me not, and I'm not going to disobey her."

"To whom is the letter addressed?"

"Do you mean who it's for, sir?"

"Yes."

"It's for his lordship—and it's to lie there till his lordship sends for it."

"In that case I may as well give it to his lordship's servant, who can take it up to the house presently."

"I don't know if that will be right, sir. She said it was to be called for."

"Then we call for it. I, his lordship's cousin, and James, his lordship's groom. Won't that do for you?"

"I suppose that will be right, sir," the girl answered doubtfully. "The letter and the box are both on the table, and I wasn't to interfere with either of 'em, and I'm not going to it. That's all I can say."

The girl was swollen with the importance of her mission as being associated with a mystery, and she was also in lively dread of her very severe mistress, who might come down the lane at any moment and surprise her in some act of dereliction.

Theodore passed her by and went into the sitting-room where he had taken tea with the Kempsters and Cuthbert Ramsay.

A letter lay on the carved oak table in front of the window, and beside the letter there stood a walnut-wood box, eighteen inches

by nine. The letter was addressed, in a bold, characteristic hand, to Lord Cheriton. To be called for. The box had a small brass plate upon the lid, and a name engraved upon the plate—

THOMAS C. DARCY,
9th Foot.

No one who had ever seen such a box before could doubt that this was a pistol-case. It was unlocked, and Theodore lifted the lid.

One pistol lay in its place, neatly fitted into the velvet-lined receptacle. The place for the second pistol was vacant.

Theodore took the Colt's revolver from his pocket and fitted it into the place beside the other pistol. It fitted exactly, and the two pistols were alike in all respects—alike as to size and fashion, alike as to the little silver plate upon the butt, and the initials, "T. D."

Thomas Darcy! Darcy was the name of Evelyn Strangway's husband, and one of those pistols which had belonged at some period to Evelyn Strangway's husband had been found in the well in the fruit garden, and the other in possession of Lord Cheriton's *protégée* and pensioner, the humble dependant at his gates, Mrs. Porter.

Theodore changed his mind as to his plan of procedure. He did not send Mrs. Porter's letter to Lord Cheriton by the groom as he had intended, after he himself had been driven to Wareham. His journey to London might be deferred now; indeed, in his present condition of mind, he was not the man to interview the authorities of Scotland Yard. He left Mrs. Porter's letter in its place beside the pistol-case, and wrote a hasty line to his kinsman at Mrs. Porter's writing-table, where all the materials for correspondence were arranged ready to his hand.

"The West Lodge, 8.15. Pray come to me here at once if you can. I have made a terrible discovery. There is a letter for you. Mrs. Porter has gone to London."

He put these lines into an envelope, sealed it, and then took it out to the groom, who was waiting stolidly, neatly tickling the cob's ears now and again, with an artistic circular movement of the lash, which brought into play all the power and ease of his wrist.

"Drive back to the house with that note as fast as you can," said Theodore, "and let his lordship know that I am waiting for him here."

CHAPTER XXX.

"Thy love and hate are both unwise ones, lady."

"WELL, Theodore, what is your discovery?" asked Lord Cheriton half an hour later, the two men standing face to face in Mrs. Porter's sitting-room, amidst the silence of the summer morning, a gigantic bee buzzing in the brown velvet heart of a tall sunflower, painfully audible to the younger man's strained ears.

"There is a letter, sir. You had better read that before I say anything," answered Theodore.

It was years since he had called his cousin sir, not since he had been a schoolboy, and had been encouraged to open his mind upon politics or cricket, over his single glass of claret, after dinner. On those occasions a boyish respect for greatness had prompted the ceremonious address; to-day it came to his lips involuntarily—as if a barrier of ice were suddenly interposed between himself and the man he had esteemed and admired for so many years of his life.

Lord Cheriton held the letter in his hand unopened, while he stood looking at the pistol-case, where both pistols occupied their places—one bright and undamaged, the other rusted and spoilt, as to outward appearance at least. He was ghastly pale, but not much more so than he had looked yesterday after he left Mrs. Porter's cottage.

"That is my discovery," said Theodore, pointing to the pistols. "I stopped short in my journey to Scotland Yard when I found that case upon the table here. I want to secure Juanita and her son from the possibilities of an insatiable hatred—but I don't want to bring trouble—or disgrace—upon you, if I can help it. You have always been good to me, Lord Cheriton. You have regarded the claims of kindred. It would be base in me if I were to forget that you are of my own blood—that you have a right to my allegiance. Tell me, for God's sake, what I am to do. Trust me, if you can. I know so much already that it will be wisest and best for you to let me know all—so that I may help you to find the murderer, and to avoid any reopening of old wounds."

"I doubt if you or any one else can help me, Theodore," said Lord Cheriton wearily, looking straight before him through the open

lattice and across the little flower-garden where the roses were still in their plenitude of colour and perfume. "I doubt if all my worldly experience will enable me to help myself even. There is a pass to which a man may come in his life—not wholly by his own fault—at which his case seems hopeless. He sees himself suddenly brought to a dead stop, deep in the mire of an impassable road, and with the words 'No thoroughfare' staring him in the face. I have come to just that point."

"Oh, but there is always an issue from every difficulty for a man of courage and resolution," said Theodore. "I know you are not a man to be easily broken down by Fate. I am half in the light and half in the dark. It must have been the owner of that pistol who killed Godfrey Carmichael—but how came the case and the fellow-pistol into Mrs. Porter's possession? Was she that man's accomplice? And who was he, and what was he, that she should be associated with him?"

"You believe that it was a man who fired that pistol?"

"Most assuredly. I believe it was the man whose wife lived for many years at Myrtle Cottage, Camberwell Grove; the man who called upon a house-agent at Camberwell to make inquiries about his wife, and who called himself by the name she bore in the neighbourhood—the name of Danvers. Danvers may have been only an alias for Darcy, and in that case the man who called upon the agent was the husband of Evelyn Strangway, and the woman who lived for so many years in the seclusion of Myrtle Cottage was old Squire Strangway's only daughter, and Captain Darcy's runaway wife."

"And you think Tom Darcy murdered my son-in-law?" asked Lord Cheriton, with a ghastly smile.

"I do."

"And what do you suppose to have been the motive of that murder?"

"Revenge—revenge upon the man who tempted his wife away from him."

"The cur who ill-used and neglected his wife—whose conduct drove her from her wretched home, and justified her abandonment of him—was never man enough to conceive such a revenge, or to hate with such a hatred. However, in this case we need not enter upon the question of motive. There is one reason why Tom Darcy cannot be suspected of any part in Sir Godfrey's murder. He died nine years ago, and was buried at my expense in Norwood Cemetery."

"Great God! then who could have fired that pistol?"

"The answer to that question is most likely here," replied Lord Cheriton quietly, as he tore open the envelope of Mrs. Porter's letter.

The letter was brief but comprehensive, and all-sufficing.

"You know now who killed your cherished daughter's husband. If she is like me she will carry her sorrow to the grave. If she is like me all her days will be darkened by cruel memories. Your broken promise blighted my life. I have blighted her life—an eye for an eye. I told you three and twenty years ago that a day would come when you would be sorry for having abandoned me. I think that day *has* come.

"EVELYN DARCY."

Lord Cheriton handed the letter to his kinsman without a word.

"Since you know so much of my history you may as well know all," he said; "so know the thorny pillow which a man makes for himself when he sacrifices the best years of his life to an illicit love."

Theodore read those ghastly lines in silence. The signature told all.

"What in Heaven's name brought Evelyn Strangway to be a lodgekeeper at the entrance of the house where she was born?" he asked, at last. "How could you permit such a life-long humiliation?"

"It was her own desire—it was at her insistence I allowed her to come here. I opposed her fancy with all my power of argument, with all the strength of opposition. I offered to provide her with a home in town or country—at home or abroad—near at hand or at the Antipodes. I offered to settle four hundred a year upon her—to sink capital to that amount—to make her future and that of—our child—secure against the chances of fate."

"Your child—Mercy!" exclaimed Theodore.

"Yes, Mercy. My daughter and hers. You understand now why she refused my help. She would take nothing from her father. There was a like perversity in mother and daughter, a determination to make me drink the cup of remorse to the dregs. Oh, Theodore, it is a long and shameful story. To you—for the first time in my life—to you only among mankind these lips have spoken of it. I have kept my secret. I have brooded upon it in the slow hours of many and many a wakeful night. I have never forgotten—I have not been allowed to forget. If time could have erased or softened that bitter memory under other conditions I know not; but for me the case was hopeless. My victim was there, at my gates, a perpetual memento of my folly and my wrong-doing."

"Strange that a woman of refinement and education should elect to fill so degrading a position!"

"Perhaps only a refined and highly educated woman could have devised so refined a punishment. 'Let me live near you,' she pleaded; 'let me live at the gate of the park I loved so well when I was a child—let me see you pass sometimes—open the gate for you and just see you go by—without a word, without a look even upon

your part. It will be some consolation for me in my lonely, loveless life. I shall know that at least I am not forgotten.' Forgotten? as if it had been possible for me to forget, in the happiest circumstances, even if she had made for herself a home at the farthest extremity of Europe, or in the remotest of our colonies. As it was, her presence embittered the place I loved—the great reward and aim of my life. Her shadow fell across my young wife's pathway—her influence darkened all my days."

He began to pace up and down the little room with a feverish air. He seemed to find a sort of relief in talking of this burden which he had borne so long in secret—borne with a smile upon his lips, suffering that silent agony which strong men have borne again and again in the history of mankind, carrying their silent punishment upon them till the grave revealed the hidden canker, and laid bare the festering wound which had rankled unsuspected by the world.

"She was cruelly treated by her husband, Theodore. A young and beautiful woman, married to a profligate and a sot. It had been a love-match, as the world calls it—that is to say, a marriage brought about by a schoolgirl's impatience to break her bonds, and a woman's first delight in hearing herself called beautiful. She had flung herself away upon a handsome reprobate; and three or four years after marriage she found herself alone and neglected in a shabby lodging in one of the squalidest streets off the Strand. I can see the wretched rooms she lived in, to-day, as I stand here—the lodging-house furniture, the dingy curtains darkening the dirty windows looking into the dirty street. What a home for youth and beauty!"

He paused, with an impatient sigh, took another turn across the narrow space, and then resumed:

"Our acquaintance began by accident—under an umbrella. I met them together one night, husband and wife, leaving the little Strand Theatre in the rain. I heard him tell her that it was not worth while to take a cab, they were so near home; and something in her proud, handsome face and her contemptuous way of replying to him caught my attention and interested me in her. I offered my umbrella, and we all three walked to Essex Street together. Just in that fortuitous way began the alliance which was to give its colour to all my life. The husband cultivated my acquaintance—was glad to meet me at my club—and dined with me as often as I cared to asked him. We used to go to Essex Street after dining together, and finish the evening with her, and so by degrees I came to know all about her—that she was the only daughter of the owner of Cheriton Chase; that she was very handsome, and very clever, though only half-educated; that she had offended her father by her marriage, and that she had not brought her husband a penny; that he neglected her, and that he drank; and that she was miserable. I

came to know this very soon; I came very soon to love her. She was the first woman I had ever cared for, and I loved her passionately."

He took another turn, and sighed again, regretfully, despairingly, as one who looks back upon the pallid ghost of a love that has long been dead.

"It began with pity. I was so sorry for her, poor soul, her wasted life, her slighted beauty. God knows that for a long time I had no thought of sin. Gradually the yearning to see more of her, to bring some brightness and pleasure into her life, became too strong for prudence, and I persuaded her to meet me unknown to her husband. We planned little excursions, innocent enough in themselves, a morning drive and a modest luncheon at Richmond, or Greenwich, or Jack Straw's Castle, a trip to Hampton Court or Windsor by boat or rail. She had hardly any acquaintances in London, and there was little fear of her being recognized. We went to a theatre together now and then, and sat in a dark stage box, happy, talking of an impossible future in the intervals of the performance. We never said as much, but I think we had both a vague idea that Providence would help us—that her husband would die young, and leave us free to be happy together. Yes, we were very fond of each other, very single-hearted in those days. She was only two and twenty, remember, and I was still a young man."

Another pause, another sigh, and a look across the roses, as if across the long lapse of years to an unforgotten past.

"Heaven knows how long we might have gone on in this way, without sin, if not without treachery to the husband, who cared so little for his wife that it seemed scarcely dishonourable to deceive him. Our fate was precipitated by circumstances. Darcy surprised a little note of mine, asking Evelyn to meet me at a theatre. He attacked his wife brutally, refused to believe anything except the worst. He called her by names that were new and hideous to her ear, and her soul rose up in arms against him. She defied him, ran out of the house, took a cab, and came to my chambers in the foggy November evening. She came to me helpless, friendless, with no one in this wide world to love her or to protect her, except me. This was the turning-point. Of course she could not stay there to be seen by my clerk and my laundress. I took her to Salisbury that night, and we spent a fortnight moving from village to village along the south coast of Devonshire. My hope was that Darcy would apply for a divorce, and that in less than a year I might make the woman I loved my wife. I rejoiced in the thought of his obscurity and hers. The record of the case would pass unnoticed in the papers, and years hence, when I should have made a position at the Bar, nobody need know that the wife I loved and honoured was once the runaway wife of another man. I had argued without allowing for the malignity of

a cur. Darcy wrote his wife one of the most diabolical letters that ever was penned by man; he wreaked his vemon upon her—upon her, the weaker sinner; he called her by all the vile epithets in his copious vocabulary, and he told her that she should never have the right to the name of an honest woman, for that he would sooner hang himself than divorce her. And so she was to drag her chain for the rest of his days; and so she was to pay the bitter price of having trusted her young life to a low-bred scoundrel."

"Hard luck for both of you," said Theodore.

"Yes, it was indeed hard luck. If you could know how truly and entirely I loved her in those days—how completely happy we should have been in each other's society, but for the embittering consciousness of our false position. Cut off by his malevolence from escape by divorce, we naturally hoped for a day when we should be released by his death. His habits were not those which conduce to length of years.

"We talked of the future—we had our plans and dreams about that life which was to be ours in after-days, when I should be making a large income, and when she would be really my wife. With that hope before her she was content to live in the strictest seclusion, to economize in every detail of our existence, to know no pleasure except that of my society. Never did a handsome woman resign herself to a duller or more unselfish existence—and yet I believe for the first few years she was happy. We were both happy —and we were full of hope.

"I remember the day she first suggested to me that I should buy Cheriton Chase when it came into the market. I was beginning to be employed in important cases, and to get big fees marked upon my briefs, and I had taken silk. I had made my name, and I was saving money. Yet the suggestion that I should buy a large estate was too wild for any one but a woman to have made. From that hour, however, it was Evelyn's *idée fixe*. She had a passionate love for her birthplace, an overweening pride in her race and name. She urged me to accumulate money—the estate would be sacrificed at half its value, perhaps,—would go for an old song. She became rigidly economical, would hardly allow herself a new gown, and her keenest delight was in the deposit notes I brought her, as my money accumulated at the Union Bank. She had no idea of investments, or interest for my accumulations. Her notions about money were a child's notions—the idea of saving a large sum to buy the desire of her heart; and the desire of her heart was Cheriton Chase.

"God knows I was honest and earnest enough in those days. I meant to buy that estate, for her sake, if it was possible to be done. I meant to marry her directly she was free to become my wife. My fidelity had not wavered after a union of ten years and more—but

Darcy was very far from dying. He had hunted out his wife in her quiet retreat, had threatened and annoyed her, and I had been obliged to buy him off by paying his passage to Canada—where he had been quartered with his regiment years before, and which he pretended would open a new field for him. Our case, so far as he was concerned, seemed hopeless, and I was beginning to feel the darkness of the outlook, when I made Maria Morales' acquaintance.

"It was the old, old story, Theodore. God forbid you should ever go through that hackneyed experience. Just as the old chain was beginning to drag heavily, a new face appeared upon my pathway—a girlish face, bright with promise and hope. I saw the opportunity of a union which would smooth my way to a great position—crown the edifice of my fortune, give me a wife of whom I might be proud. Could I ever have been proud of the woman who had sacrificed her good name for my sake? I was bound to her by every consideration of honour and duty. But there was the fatal stain across both our lives. I could not take her into society without the fear of hearing malignant whispers as we passed. However well these social secrets may be kept, there is always some enemy to hunt them out, and the antecedents of James Dalbrook's wife would have been public property.

"And here was a beautiful and innocent girl who loved me well enough to accept me as her husband although I was twenty years her senior, loved me with that youthful upward-looking love which is of all sentiments the most attractive to a man who has lived a hard work-a-day life in a hard work-a-day world. To spend an hour with Maria was to feel a Sabbath peacefulness which solaced and refreshed my soul. I felt ten years younger when I was with her than I felt in my own—home."

He stopped, with a heart-broken sigh.

"Oh, Theodore, beware of such burdens as that which I laid upon my shoulders; beware of such a chain as I wound about my steps. What a dastard a man feels himself when his love begins to cool for the woman who cast her life upon one chance—who leans upon him as the beginning and end of her existence. I have walked up and down the quiet pathway before Myrtle Cottage for an hour at a stretch, dreading to go in, lest she should read my treason in my face. The break came at last—suddenly. I paltered with my fate for a long time. I carried on a kind of Platonic flirtation with Maria Morales, taking monstrous pains to let her know that I never meant to go beyond Platonics—reminding her of the difference of our ages, and of my almost paternal regard—the vain subterfuge of a self-deluded man. One moment of impulse swept away all barriers, and I left Onslow Square Maria's engaged husband. Her father's generosity precipitated matters. Squire Strangway had

been dead nearly a year, and the estate was in the hands of the mortgagee, who had been trying to sell it for some time. My future father-in-law was eager for the purchase directly I suggested it to him, and my wife's dowry afforded me the means of realizing Evelyn's long-cherished dream."

"Cruel for her, poor creature."

"Cruel—brutal—diabolical! I felt the blackness of my treason, and yet it had been brought about by circumstances rather than by any deliberate act of mine. I had to go to the woman who still loved me, and still trusted me, and tell her what I was going to do. I had to do this, and I did it—by word of mouth—face to face—not resorting to the coward's expedient of pen and ink. God help me, the memory of that scene is with me now. It was too terrible for words; but after the storm came a calm, and a week later I went across to Boulogne with her, and saw her comfortably established there at a private hotel, where she was to remain as long as she liked, while she made up her mind as to her future residence. The furniture was sent to the Pantechnicon. The *home* was broken up for ever."

"And the daughter, where was she?"

Lord Cheriton answered with a smile of infinite bitterness.

"The daughter had troubled us very little. Evelyn was not an exacting mother. The child's existence was a burden to her—rendered hateful by the stigma upon her birth, which the mother could not forget. Mercy's infancy was spent in a Buckinghamshire village, in the cottage of her foster-mother. Mother and daughter never lived under the same roof till they came here together, when Mercy was seven years old."

"Yet, according to village tradition, Mrs. Porter was passionately fond of her daughter, and broken-hearted at her loss."

"Village tradition often lies. I do not believe that Evelyn ever loved her child. She bitterly felt the circumstances of her birth—she bitterly resented her unhappy fate; but I believe it was her pride, her deep sense of wrong done to herself, which tortured her rather than her love for her only child. She is a strange woman, Theodore—a woman who could do that deed—a woman who could write that letter. Your friend has fathomed her unhappy secret. She was a mad woman when she fired that shot. She was mad when she penned that letter. And now, Theodore, I have trusted you as I have never before trusted mortal man. I have ripped open an old wound. You know all, and you see what lies before me. I have to find that woman and to save her from the consequences of her crime, and to save my daughter and my grandson from the hazards of a mad woman's malignity. You can help me, Theodore, if you can keep a cool, clear brain, and do just what I ask you to do, and no more."

He put aside his emotion with one stupendous effort, and became a man of iron, cool, resolute, unflinching.

"I will obey you implicitly," said Theodore.

He had been completely won by his kinsman's candour. Had James Dalbrook told him anything less than the truth he would have despised him. As it was, he felt that he could still respect him, in spite of that fatal error, which had brought such deadly retribution.

"It is early yet," said Lord Cheriton, looking at his watch, and from that to the neat little clock on the mantelpiece, where the hands pointed to twenty minutes past nine. "The dog-cart is waiting outside. Do you drive to the Priory and put yourself on guard there till—till that unhappy woman has been traced. You can tell Juanita that I have sent you there—that I have heard of dangerous characters being about, and that I am afraid of her being in the house with only servants. My wife shall follow you later, and can stay at the Priory while I am away from home, which I must be, perhaps, for some time. I have to find her, Theodore."

"Have you any idea where she may be gone?"

"For the moment, none. She may have made her way to the nearest river and thrown herself in. Living or dead, I have to find her. That is my business. And when I have found her I have to get her put away out of the reach of the law. *That* is my business."

"God help you to carry it through," said Theodore. "I shall stay at the Priory till I hear from you. Be so kind as to ask Lady Cheriton to bring my portmanteau and dressing-bag in her carriage this afternoon. I may tell Juanita that her mother is coming to-day, may I not?"

"Decidedly! Good-bye. God bless you, Theodore. I know that I may rely upon your holding your tongue. I know I can rely upon your active help if I should need you."

And so with a cordial grasp of hands they parted, Theodore to take his seat in the dog-cart, and drive towards the Priory to offer himself to his cousin as her guest for an indefinite period. It was a curious position in which he found himself; but the delight of being in Juanita's society, of being in somewise her protector, was a counterbalance to the embarrassing conditions under which he was to approach her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Love's reason's without reason."

The cob was all the fresher for the impatience which he had suffered in standing for nearly an hour in the lane, and he bowled the dog-cart along the level roads at a tremendous pace. Theodore arrived at the Priory before eleven, and found Juanita sitting on the lawn with her baby in her lap, and the dog Styx at her side. His heart leapt with gladness at the sight of her sitting there, safe and happy, in the morning sunshine, for his morbid imagination had been at work as he drove along, and he had been haunted by hideous visions of some swift and bloody act which might be done by the fugitive mad woman before he could reach the Priory. What deed might not be done by a woman in the state of mind which that woman must have been in when she left the evidence and the confession of her crime upon the table and fled out of her house in the early morning? A silent thanksgiving went up from his heart to his God as he saw Juanita sitting in the sunshine, smiling at him, holding out her hand to him in surprised welcome. She was safe, and it was his business to guard her against that deadly enemy. He knew now whence the danger was to come—whose the hand he had to fear. It was no longer a nameless enemy, an inscrutable peril from which he had to defend her.

"How early you are, Theodore. Everybody is well, I hope—there is nothing wrong at home?"

"No. Every one is well. Your father is going to London for a few days, and your mother is coming to stay with you during his absence, and I come to throw myself on your hospitality while she is here. His lordship has heard of some suspicious characters in your neighbourhood, and has taken it into his head that it will be well for you to have me as your guest until your brothers-in-law come to you for the shooting. I hope you won't mind having me, Juanita?"

"Mind, no; I am delighted to have you, and my mother, too. I was beginning to feel rather lonely, and had half decided on carrying baby off to Swanage. Isn't he a fortunate boy to have two doating grandmothers?" She checked herself with a sudden sigh, remembering in what respect the richly-dowered infant was so much poorer than other babies. "Yes darling," she murmured,

bending over the sleeping face, rosy amidst its lace and ribbons as it nestled against her arm. "Yes, there is plenty of love for you upon earth, my fatherless one; and, who knows, perhaps *his* love is watching over you in heaven."

After this maternal interlude she remembered the obligations of hospitality.

"Have you breakfasted, Theodore? You must have left Cheriton very early."

Theodore did not tell her how early, but he confessed to having taken only a cup of tea.

"Then I will order some breakfast out here for you. It is such a perfect morning. Baby and I will stay with you while you take your breakfast."

She called the nurse, who was close by, and gave her orders, and presently the gipsy table was brought out, and a cosy breakfast was arranged upon the shining damask, and Theodore was having his coffee poured out for him by the loveliest hands he had ever seen, while the nurse paraded up and down the lawn with the newly-awakened baby.

"I cannot understand my father taking an alarm of that kind," Juanita said, presently, after a thoughtful silence. "It is so unlike him. As if any harm could come to me from tramps or gipsies, or even professional burglars, with half a dozen men-servants in the house, and all my jewels safe at the Bank. Theodore, does it mean anything?" she asked, suddenly. "Does it mean that my father has found out something about the murder?"

He was silent, painfully embarrassed by this home question. To answer it would be to break faith with Lord Cheriton; to refuse to answer was in some manner to break his promise to Juanita.

"I must ask you to let me leave that question unanswered for a few days," he said. "Whatever discovery has been made it is your father's discovery, and not mine. His lips alone can tell it to you."

"You know who murdered my husband?"

"No, Juanita, I know nothing. The light we are following may be a false one."

He remembered how many lying confessions of crime had been made by lunacy since the history of crime began—how poor distraught creatures who would not have killed a worm had taken upon themselves the burden of notorious assassinations, and had put the police to the trouble of proving them self-accusing perjurers. Might not Mrs. Porter be such an one as these?

"Ah! but you are following some new light—you are on the track of his murderer?"

"I think we are. But you must be patient, Juanita. You must wait till your father may choose to speak. The business is out of my hands now, and has passed into his."

"And he is going to London to-day, you say—he is going upon that business?"

"I have said too much already, Juanita. I entreat you to ask me no more."

She gave an impatient sigh, and turned from her cousin to the dog, as if he were the more interesting companion of the two.

"Well, I suppose I must be content to wait," she said; "but if you knew what I have suffered—what I shall suffer till that mystery is solved—you would not wonder if I feel angry at being kept in the dark. Has your friend gone back to London?"

"Yes; but he is coming again before my holiday is over. You like him, I know, Juanita," he added, looking at her somewhat earnestly.

"Yes, I like him," she answered, carelessly, but with a faint blush. "I suppose most people like him, do they not? He is so bright and clever."

"I am very glad you like him. He is the most valued friend I have—indeed, I might almost say he is the only friend I made for myself at the University. I made plenty of acquaintances, but very few I cared to meet in after-life. Ramsay was like a brother. It would have been a real grief to me if our friendship had not lasted."

"He is ambitious, is he not?"

"Very ambitious."

"And proud?"

"Very proud; but it is a noble pride—the pride that keeps a man straight in all his doings—the pride that prefers bread and cheese in a garret to turtle and venison at a parvenu's table. He is a splendid fellow, Nita, and I am proud of his friendship."

"Is he very busy, that he should be so determined to leave Dorchester?"

"Yes; he is full of work always. I thought he might have been content to take two or three weeks' quiet reading in our sleepy old town, but he wanted to get back to the hospital. He will come back for a day or two when the whim seizes him. He has always been erratic in his pleasures, but steady as a rock in his work."

CHAPTER XXXII.

'The heaviness and guilt within my bosom
Takes off my manhood."

Lord Cheriton put the pistol-case under his arm and left the cottage. The case was covered by his loose summer overcoat, and anybody meeting him in the Park might have supposed that he was carrying a book, or might have failed to observe that he was carrying anything whatever. As it happened he met nobody between the West Gate and the house. He went in at the open window of the library, locked the pistol-case in one of the capacious drawers of the large writing-table—drawers which contained many of his most important documents, and which were provided with the safest lever locks.

When this was done he went to his wife's morning-room, where she was generally to be found at this hour, her light breakfast finished, and her newspaper-reading or letter-writing begun.

"Where have you been so early, James?" she asked, looking up at him with an affectionate smile. "I was surprised to hear you had gone out before breakfast."

He looked at her in silence for a few moments—lost in thought. The beautiful and gracious face turned towards him in gentle inquiry had never frowned upon him in all their years of wedded life. Never had that tranquil affection failed him. There had been no dramatic passion in their love, no fierce alternations of despair and bliss—no doubts, no jealousies. His girlish wife had given herself to him in implicit trustfulness, fond of him, and proud of him, believing in him with a faith second only to her faith in God. For three and twenty years of cloudless wedded life she had made his days happy. Never in all those years had she given him reason for one hour of doubt or trouble. She had been his loving and loyal helpmate, sharing his hopes and his ambitions, caring for the people he cared for, respecting even his prejudices, shaping her life in all things to please him.

Great heaven! what a contrast with that other woman, whose fiery and exacting love had made his life subordinate to hers—whose jealousy had claimed the total surrender of all other ties, of all other pleasures, had cut him off from all the advantages of

society, had deprived him of the power to make friends among his fellow-men, had kept him as her bond-slave, accepting nothing less than a complete isolation from all that men hold best in life.

He looked at his wife's calm beauty—where scarce a line upon the ivory-white forehead marked the progress of years—the soft, gazelle-like eyes lifted so meekly to meet his own. He compared this placid face with that other face, handsome, too, after its fashion—long after the bloom of youth had gone—but marked in every feature with the traces of a nervous temperament, a fiery temper, the face of a woman in whose character there were none of the elements of domestic happiness—or, in a word, the face of a Strangway, the daughter of a perverse and unhappy race, from whose line no life of happiness and well-doing had arisen within the memory of man.

"My dear Maria, I was wrong in not leaving a message. I was sent for to Mrs. Porter's cottage. She has gone away in rather a mysterious manner."

"Gone away!"

"Yes. That in itself is rather astonishing, you know; but there was something so strange in her manner of leaving that I feel it my duty to look after her. I shall go up to town by the midday train. I have other business which may keep me in London for a few days, till the shooting begins, perhaps. I have sent Theodore to the Priory to tell Juanita that you are going to her this afternoon, and that you will stay with her till I come back."

"That is disposing of me rather as if I were a chattel," said his wife, smiling.

"I knew you would be glad of a few days' quiet baby-worship at the Priory, and I knew this house would be dull for you without any visitors."

"Yes, there is always a gloom upon the house when you are away—a much deeper gloom since last summer. No sooner am I alone than I begin to think of that dreadful night when my poor girl saw her murdered husband lying at her feet. Yes, James, you are right in sending me away. I shall be happy at the Priory with my darling—and she can never again be happy with me in this house."

Lord Cheriton breakfasted in his wife's room—it was only an apology for breakfast, for he was too agitated to eat; but he refreshed himself with a cup of strong tea, and he enjoyed the restfulness of his wife's companionship while he sat there waiting for the carriage which was to take him to Wareham.

"What makes you so uneasy about Mrs. Porter?" Lady Cheriton asked presently.

"The suddenness and strangeness of her departure, in the first place. It would have been only natural she should have com-

municated with you or me before she left. And, in the second place, I have been made uneasy by an observation of Mr. Ramsay's. He has conceived the opinion that Mrs. Porter is not altogether right in her mind—that there is a strain of madness."

"Oh, James, that would be dreadful!"

"Yes, it would be dreadful to think of her wandering about alone. The very fact that she has hardly left that cottage for the last twenty years, except to go to church, would make her nervous and helpless among strangers and in a strange town. She would hardly be able to take care of herself, perhaps—and if, in addition to this, her mind is not quite right——"

"Oh, poor thing! It is terrible to think of it. And you do not even know where she has gone?"

"She told the servant she was going to London. God knows whether that is true or false. She took no luggage, not even a hand-bag."

"She may have gone to her daughter."

"To Mercy? Yes, that is an idea. It never occurred to me. She has been so cold and hard about her daughter in all these years—and yet it may be so. She may have relented at last."

A servant announced the carriage. His Lordship's portmanteau had been got in, and all was ready.

"Good-bye, Maria. I have no time to lose, as I have inquiries to make and telegrams to despatch at the station."

"You will stay in Victoria Street, of course?"

"Yes. I shall telegraph to Mrs. Begby. I am taking Wilson; I shall be very well taken care of, be sure, dearest."

He kissed her and hurried away. He sighed as he left that atmosphere of perfect peace—sighed again as he thought of the business that lay before him. He had to find her—this murderess—he had to prove that she was mad—if it were possible—and to put her away for the rest of her days in some safe retreat, secure from the hazard of discovery—a hard and bitter task for the man who had once loved her, and whose love had been her destruction.

He made his inquiries of the station-master. Yes, Mrs. Porter had left by the early train. She had taken a second-class ticket for Waterloo.

Lord Cheriton telegraphed to Miss Marian Gray, at 69, Hercules Buildings, Lambeth—

"If your mother is with you when you receive this, I beg you to detain her till I come.

"CHERITON."

His wife's suggestion seemed to him like inspiration. Where else could that desolate woman seek for a shelter but under the roof

which sheltered her only child? She was utterly friendless in London and elsewhere — unless, indeed, her old governess Sarah Newton could be counted as a friend.

The Weymouth up-train steamed in, and he took his seat in the corner of a first-class compartment, where he was tolerably secure of being left to himself for the whole of the journey, guards and porters conspiring to protect his seclusion, albeit he had not taken the trouble to engage a compartment. His greatness was known all along the line.

He had ample leisure for thought during that three hours' journey, leisure to live over again that life of long ago which had been brought so vividly back to his memory by the events of to-day. He had made it his business to forget that past life, so far as forgetfulness was possible, with that living reminder for ever at his gate. Habit had even reconciled him to the presence of Mrs. Porter at the West Lodge. Her supreme quietude had argued her contentment. Never by so much as one imprudent word, or one equivocal look, had she aroused his wife's doubts as to her past relations with her employer. She had been accepted by all the little world of Cheriton, she had behaved in the most exemplary manner; and although he had never driven in at the West Gate, and seen her standing there in her attitude of stern humility, without a pang of remorse and a stinging sense of shame, yet that sharp moment of pain being past, he was able to submit to her existence as the one last forfeit he had to pay for his sin. And now he knew that the statue-like calm of her face, as she had looked up at him in the clear light, under the branching beeches, had been only the mask of hidden fires—that through all those years in which she had seemed the image of quiet resignation, of submission to a mournful fate, she had been garnering up her vengeance to wreak it upon the offender in his most unguarded hour, piercing the breast of the father through the innocent heart of the child. He knew now that hatred had been for ever at his doors, that angry pride had watched his going in and coming out, under the guise of humility—that by day and by night hideous thoughts had been busy in that hyper-active brain, such thoughts as point the way to madness and to crime.

When he had made up his mind to break his promise to Evelyn Darcy, and to marry another woman, fifteen years her junior, he had told himself that the wrench once made, the link once sundered, all would be over. She would submit as other women have submitted to the common end of such ties. She could not deem herself more unfortunate than those other women had been, since his attachment had endured far longer than the average span of illicit loves. He had been patient and faithful and unselfish in his devotion for more than a decade. He would have gone on waiting perhaps had there been a ray of hope; but Tom Darcy had shown a

malignant persistency in keeping alive; and even were Tom Darcy dead how bitter a thing it would be for the fashionable Queen's Counsel to enter society with a wife of damaged character. In the old days of hopefulness and fond love they had told each other that the stain upon the past need never be known in that brilliant future to which they both looked forward; but now he told himself that despite their secluded life the facts of that past would ooze out. People would insist upon finding out who Mr. Dalbrook's wife was. It would not be enough to say, "She is there—handsome, clever, and a lady." Society would peer and pry into the background of her life. Whose daughter was she? Had she been married before? And in that case who was her husband? Where had she lived before her recent marriage? Had she spent her earlier years in the Colonies or on the Continent, or how was it that society had seen nothing of her?

Those inevitable questions would have made his life a burden and her life an agony, James Dalbrook told himself; even had Darcy been so complaisant as to die and leave them free to rehabilitate their position by marriage; but Darcy had shown no disposition towards dying, and now here was a lovely girl with a fortune willing to marry him—a girl to whom his heart had gone out, despite his conscientious endeavour to be faithful to that old attachment.

To-day, in his agony of remorse and apprehension, he could recall the scene of their severance as well as if it had happened yesterday.

He had gone home in the chill March twilight, in that depressing season when the pale spring flowers, daffodils, primroses, and narcissus are fighting their ineffectual battle with the cutting east wind, when the sparrows have eaten the hearts of all the crocuses, and the scanty grass in suburban gardens is white with dust, when the too-early lighted lamps have a sickly look in the windy streets, and the neglected fires in suburban drawing-rooms are more dismal than fireless hearths.

Camberwell Grove was not at its best in this bleak March season. The time had been when the long narrow garden at Myrtle Cottage was carefully kept, and when Evelyn had taken a pride in the old-fashioned flower-borders and the blossoming creepers upon the verandah, but for the last two or three years she had been careless and indifferent, and one jobbing-gardener having left the neighbourhood she had taken no pains to get another in his place; nor had she done any of that weeding and watering and pruning, which had at one time helped to shorten the long light evenings. A weariness of all things had come upon her, tired out with waiting for brighter days.

He had refused Don Jose's pressing invitation to dine in Onslow Square. He had turned his back upon the warm brightness of

newly-furnished drawing-rooms, an atmosphere of hot-house flowers, great rush baskets of tulips, hyacinths, and narcissus, low vases of lilies of the valley and Parma violets; and amidst all this brightness and colour the beautiful Spanish girl, with her pale, clear complexion and soft black eyes. He had left his newly-betrothed wife reluctant to let him go, in order to face the most painful crisis that can occur in any man's life; in order to tell the woman who had loved and trusted him that love was at an end between them; that the bond was broken, and his promise of no account.

"I expected you earlier, James," she said, opening the door to him.

It was rarely that the door was opened by a servant when he went home. She was always waiting for his knock.

"Yes, it is late, I know. I have been detained. I have lingered a little on the way—I walked from the West End."

"What, all the way? By the Walworth Road, that low neighbourhood you dislike so much?"

"I did not care where I walked, Evelyn. I was too miserable to think about my surroundings."

"Miserable?" she asked, looking at him searchingly, and growing pale as she looked, as if the pallor of his face reflected itself in hers, "what should make you miserable?"

They were standing in the drawing-room, where the moderator lamp upon the table shone bright and clear upon his troubled face.

"You have lost your money, James—you have speculated—you won't be able to buy Cheriton Chase," she said breathlessly.

"Nonsense, Evelyn. Don't you know that you have the deposit notes for every pound I ever saved locked up in your desk."

"Ah, but you might speculate—you may have ruined yourself, all the same."

"I have not ruined myself that way, Evelyn. Oh! for God's sake, forgive me, pity me, if you can. I have engaged myself to a girl who loves me, though I am twenty years her senior; a girl who is proud of me and believes in me. This engagement means a new and happy life for me, and may mean release for you—who knows? We have neither of us been happy lately. I think we have both felt that the end must come."

She laid her hand upon his breast, holding the lapel of his coat tightly with her thin white fingers, as if she would pin him there for ever, looking straight into his eyes, with her own eyes dilated and flaming.

"You are a coward and a traitor!" she said, between her clenched teeth. "You are lying, and you know you are lying. The tie has grown weaker for you, perhaps—not for me. For me every year has strengthened it—for me every hope I have has pointed to one future—the future in which I am to be your wife. You know what my husband's habits are—you know what his life is worth as com-

pared with yours. You know that we must be near the end of our probation, that suddenly, without an hour's warning, we may hear of his death, and you will be free to give me the name and place I have earned by ten years' fidelity, and patience, and self-denial. You know this, and that my life is bound up in yours; that I cannot exist without you except as the most miserable of women; that I have not a friend in the world, not a hope in the world, not an ambition in the world but you; and you look me in the face with those cold, cruel eyes, and tell me you have engaged yourself to a girl twenty years your junior, that you are going to cast me off—me, your wife of ten years—more than wife in devotion, more than wife in self-sacrifice——"

"God knows the sacrifice was mutual, Evelyn. If there has been surrender on your side there has been surrender on mine. I have turned my back upon society just at the time when it would have been most enjoyable and most valuable. But I won't even try to excuse myself. I have acted very badly—I deserve the worst you can say of me. I thought I was sure of myself, I thought I was rock; but the hour of temptation came, and I was not strong enough to withstand it. Be generous, Evelyn. Clasp hands and forgive me. Wherever I am and whatever I do your welfare shall be my first, most sacred care. The money I have saved shall be invested for your benefit—shall be secured to your use and our daughter's after you."

"Money, benefit," she cried, wildly. "How dare you talk to me of money? How dare you put my wrongs in the balance against your sordid money? Do you think money can help me to forget you—or to hate myself less than I do for having loved and trusted you?"

And then followed a paroxysm of passionate despair at the memory of which, after all the intervening years of peace and prosperity, wedded love and deadened conscience, his blood ran cold. He found himself face to face with a woman's frenzy, impotent to comfort or to tranquillize her. There was a moment when he had to exert brute force to prevent her from dashing her brains out against the wall.

All through that long, hideous night he watched by her, and pleaded with her, and guarded her from her own violence. At one time he was on his knees before her, offering to give up the desire of his heart, to break his solemn engagement of a few hours old, and to remain true to her till the end of time; but she spurned his offered sacrifice.

"What, now that I know you love another woman? What, keep you by my side, while I know your heart is elsewhere? What, have you mine by the strength of a chain, like a galley-slave linked to his gaol-companion, knowing that you hate me? Not for worlds

—not to be a duchess. No, no, no! The wrong is done—the wrong was in withdrawing your love. There is no such thing as faithfulness from you to me. All is over."

He argued against himself—implored her to accept his sacrifice.

"I would do anything in this world, pay any price, rather than see such despair as I have seen to-night," he said, standing in the cold, grey dawn, haggard and aged by the long night of agony, beside the bed where that convulsed form lay writhing, with tear-disfigured face, lips wounded and blood-stained, strained eye-balls, and dishevelled hair.

She was adamant against his pleading.

"You cannot give me back my trust in you. I am not the coarse, common creature you think me. I do not want to keep your dull clay when your heart has gone to another. I will show you that I can live without you."

This was the beginning of a calmer mood, which he was fain to welcome, though he knew that it was the icy calmness of despair. Before the world was astir in Camberwell Grove she had grown curiously quiet and rational. She had bathed her distorted features and bound up her hair. She was clothed and in her right mind again; and she sat quietly listening while he told her the story of his temptation, and how this new love had crept into his heart unawares, and how an innocent girl's naïve preference had flattered him into infidelity to the love of ten years. She listened quietly while he spoke of the future, trying to make a sunny picture of the new home, in England or abroad, which she was to create for herself.

"You have been far too self-denying," he said; "you have sacrificed even your own comfort to help me to grow rich. You must at least share my prosperity. Money need be no object in your future existence. Chose your new home where you will, and let it be as bright and enjoyable as ample means can make it."

"I will take nothing from you but the bare necessities of existence," she said. "I will go to the obscurest spot that I can find, and rot there alone, or with my daughter, as you think fit. I may ask one favour of you. Get me out of this house as soon as you can. I was once happy here," she added hoarsely, looking round the room with an expression that tortured him.

"I will take you across the Channel to-day, if you like. Change of air and scene may do you good. You have lived too long in this place."

"Ten years too long," she answered, with a faint laugh.

He went across to Boulogne with her by the night mail, established her in a private hotel in the Grande Rue, and left her there within an hour of their landing, with a pocket-book containing a hundred pounds in her lap. Nothing could exceed his tenderness

in this parting; nor could any man's compassion for a woman he had ceased to love be deeper than his. He was full of thoughtfulness for her future. He implored her to think of him as her devoted friend, to whom her welfare was of the uttermost importance, to call upon him unhesitatingly for any help in any scheme of life which she might make for herself.

"I shall warehouse your furniture at the Pantechnicon, so that wherever you fix your future abode it may be conveyed there," he said. "We took some pains in choosing those things, and you may prefer them to newer, and even better furniture. Write to me when you have made your choice of a new home."

"Home," she echoed, and that was all.

"When you have found that home and settled down there, you will have Mercy to share your life, will you not?" he pleaded. "The child will be a comfort to you."

"A comfort, yes. She was born under such happy conditions—she has such reason to be proud of her parentage! Mercy—Mercy what? She must have some kind of surname, I suppose, before she is much older. What is she to be called?"

"You are very cruel, Evelyn. What does a name matter?"

"Everything. A name means a history. Should I be here—and you bidding me good-bye—if my name were Dalbrook? It is just because my name is *not* Dalbrook that you can cast me adrift—like a rotten boat which a man sends down the stream to be stranded on a mudbank, and moulder there piecemeal, inch by inch."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"One little flash of summer light,
One brief and passionate dream."

Lord Cheriton sent his valet and his portmanteau to Victoria Street in a cab, and walked to Hercules Buildings. It was a short distance from the terminus, and the movement was a relief to his troubled brain. He was strangely agitated in approaching the girl whom he had known only as Mercy Porter, who had lived to twenty-seven years of age, almost as a stranger to him, whom he had looked upon in her girlhood with a keen and painful interest, but an interest which he had never betrayed by one outward sign. It was her mother's perversity and wrongheadedness, he told himself, which had necessitated this complete estrangement. Had she consented to bring up her daughter anywhere else he might have acted in somewise as a father to her. But she had chosen to plant the girl there, at his gates, in the sight of his wife and her child; and he was thus constrained to ignore the tie, to repress every token of interest, every sign of emotion, to act his lifelong lie, and play his part of benefactor and patron to the end.

And now he had reason to believe that Mercy had discovered the secret of her birth. Her contemptuous refusal of his bounty could proceed, he thought, from no other cause. She knew that he was her father, and she would accept no boon from a father who had denied her his name and his love.

She resented her mother's wrongs, as well as her own. His heart sank at the thought of standing before her—his daughter and his judge!

The house in Hercules Buildings was decent and clean-looking. The woman who opened the door told him that Miss Gray was at home, and directed him to the second-floor back.

"Is she alone?" he asked. "Has there been no one with her this morning?"

"No, sir. She don't have anybody come to see her once in six months, except Miss Newton."

Lady Cheriton's conjecture was not the inspiration he had thought.

Mrs. Porter had not made her way here. What if she had doubled back after starting in the train for London—got out at the first station and gone to the Priory—to realize that ghastly apprehension of Theodore Dalbrook's, and to follow up her scheme of vengeance by some new crime. Once admit that she was mad, and there was no limit to the evil she might attempt and do. His only comfort was in the idea that Juanita's cousin was there, on the alert to guard her from every possible attack.

He knocked at the door of the back room on the second-floor landing, and it was opened by the faded woman he had seen last in her fresh young beauty, a fair, bright face at a rustic casement, framed in verdure. The face was sadly aged since he had looked upon it, and if it was beautiful still it was with the beauty of outline and expression, rather than of youthful freshness and colouring.

The grave sad eyes were lifted to his face as Mercy made way for him to enter. She placed a chair for him, and stood a little way off, waiting for him to speak. He looked at the small room with infinite sadness. Her neatness and ingenuity had made the best of the poorest means, and the shabby little room had as fresh and gay an air as if it had been a room in an Alpine chalet, or a farmhouse in Normandy. The poor little pallet-bed was hidden by white dimity curtains, the washstand was screened by a drapery of the same white dimity, daintily arranged with bright ribbon bows. There was a shelf of neatly bound books above the mantelpiece, and there were bits of Japanese china here and there, giving a touch of brilliant colour to the cheap white paper on the walls and the white draperies. The room had been furnished by Mercy herself. The chairs were of wicker work, cushioned and decorated by Mercy's clever hands. There was a pine chest of drawers, with a Japanese looking-glass hanging above it, and there was a quaint little japanned table of bright vermilion at the side of Mercy's armchair. That poor little second-floor bedroom, with its one window, and most unlovely outlook, was Mercy's only source of pride. She had pinched herself to buy those inexpensive chairs, and the luxury of the Japanese glass, the lacquered tea-tray with its Satsuma cups and saucers, and the turquoise and absinthe tinted vases, all those trifling details which made her room so different from the rooms of most work-girls. She had stained and waxed the old deal boards with her own hands, and it was her own labour that kept the floor polished and dustless, and the window-panes bright and clear. The natural instinct of a lady showed itself in that love of fair surroundings.

"I hoped to find your mother with you," said Lord Cheriton.

"Why? I received your telegram, and could not understand what it meant. Is there anything wrong with my mother?"

"She left her home early this morning—suddenly—no one knows why or wherefore. I am intensely anxious to find her."

"But why? She has been able to take care of herself very well for the last twenty years. You have not been particularly interested in her all that time. Why should you be anxious to-day?"

"Because I have reason to think that all is not well with her—that her mind is not quite right—and I am full of fear lest she should do something rash."

"God help her," sighed Mercy, the pale face growing just a shade whiter. "If you had seen much of her in the years that are gone your fears would not have come so late in the day."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that her mind has been unsettled ever since I was old enough to observe and to understand her. I was little more than a child when I found out that she had brooded upon one great sorrow until all her thoughts were warped—all charity and kindly feeling were dead in her—dead or frozen into a dreadful numbness, a torpor of the soul. She never really loved me—me, her only child, who tried very hard to win her love. God knows how I loved her, having no one else to love. There was always a barrier between us—the barrier of some bitter memory. I could never get near her heart."

He did not answer for some minutes, but stood up looking out of the window at the dreary prospect of slated roof and smoke-blackened chimney-pot, prospect in which a few red tiles or an old gable-end were as a glimpse of beauty, amidst the all-pervading greyness and cruel monotony of form and hue. He felt a constraint upon him such as he had never felt in all his life before—felt tongue-tied, helpless, paralyzed by a deep sense of shame and self-humiliation before this unacknowledged daughter, who under happier circumstances might have looked up to him and honoured him as the first among men. In this bitter hour the name that he had won for himself in the world, the fortune which his talent had earned for him were as dust and ashes—the bitter ashes beneath the dazzling brightness of the dead sea fruit.

"Why do you stop in this back room, Mercy?" he asked abruptly. "Why do you condemn yourself to look out upon chimney-pots and blackened roofs, when you have all the world to choose from if you like? Why in pity's name did you refuse my offer of an income?"

"Because I will take nothing from you—nothing—nothing—nothing!"

Her lips closed in a rigid line after that reiterated word. Her eyes looked straight before her, cold, calm, resolute.

"Why are you so hard upon me?"

"Why? You ask me why—you, who let me live at your gates in meek dependence on your bounty, nameless, fatherless, living a life of miserable monotony with a heart-broken woman in whose frozen breast even maternal love was dead. You who patted me on the head once in half-a-year, and patronized me, and condescended to me, as if I were of another race and of a different clay. You, my father—you who could be content to let me grow from a child to a woman and never once let your heart go out to me, and never once be moved to clasp me in your arms and confess the tie between us. You who saw me come to your fine house and go away, and often pretended not to see me, or passed me with a side-glance and a little motion of your hand as if I were a dog that ran by you in the street. You, my father—you, whose friend saw me so friendless and alone that he could lie to me with impunity, knowing there was no one in this world to take my part or to call him to account for his lies. Had you been different, my fate might have been different."

"He was a villain, Mercy. God knows, I have suffered enough on that score. I would have called him to account, I would have punished him; but I had to think of my wife. I dared not act—there was a monster in my path before which the boldest man sometimes turns coward—publicity. Who was it told you, Mercy—when was it that you discovered my secret?"

"He told me—taunted me with my mother's story. He had guessed it, I think; but though he had no proofs to give me, instinct told me that it was true. My mother's life and character had always been a mystery to me. I understood both by the light of that revelation."

"He told you the truth, Mercy. Yes, all my life as regards you was a solemn sham. It was your mother's determination to live at Cheriton, and nowhere else, which made me a stranger to my own child. Had your home been elsewhere—far from my wife and her surroundings—I might have acted in some wise a father's part. I might have acknowledged our relationship—I might have seen you from time to time in the freedom of paternal intercourse—I could have interested myself in your education, watched over your welfare. As it was, I had to play my difficult part as best I might."

"You would have had to reckon with my mother's broken heart wherever she had lived," answered Mercy. "Do you think I could have ever valued your fatherly interest, knowing the measure of her wrong? In my ignorance I looked up to you as our benefactor. You cheated me of my gratitude and respect—you, who were the cause of all our sorrows. I saw my mother's mind growing more and more embittered as the years went by. My youth was spent with a woman whose lips had forgotten how to smile—with a

mother who never spoke a motherly word, or kissed her child with a motherly kiss. And then when love came—or that which seemed love—can you wonder that I was weak and helpless in the hour of temptation—I, who had never known what tenderness meant before I heard his voice, before his lips touched mine? The only happiness I ever knew upon this earth was my happiness with him. It was short enough, God knows, but it was something. It was my only sunshine—the only year in all my life in which the world seemed beautiful and life worth living. Yes, it was at least a dream of loving and being loved; but it was followed by a bitter waking."

"He was a scoundrel, Mercy. You were not his first victim; but his youth was past, and I believed in his reform. I should not have asked him to my wife's house had I not so believed. When I heard that he had tempted you away from your mother I was in despair. I would have made any sacrifice to save you, except the one sacrifice of facing a hideous scandal, except the sacrifice of my social position and my wife's happiness. Had you alone been in question I might have taken a bolder and more generous course, but you are right when you say I had to reckon with your mother. I might have confessed the existence of my daughter—might have secured my wife's kindness and sympathy for that daughter—but how could I say to her, The woman who lives beside your gate is the woman who ought to have been my wife, and who for ten years was to me as a wife, and relied upon my promise that no other woman upon earth should ever occupy that place? I was fettered, Mercy, caught in the toils, powerless to act a manly part. I did what I could. I tried to trace you and Tremayne—failed, and never knew what had become of him till I read of his death in Afghanistan. He was a married man when he crossed your path, separated from his wife, who had not used him over well. It was the knowledge of his domestic troubles that inclined me to hold out the hand of friendship to him at that time. He behaved infamously to you, I fear, my poor girl."

"He only did what most men do, I suppose, under the same circumstances. He only acted as you acted to my mother. He grew tired of me. Only his weariness came in less than ten years—in less than two. He took me roaming all over the world in his yacht. Those days and nights at sea—or lying off some white city, gleaming against a background of olive-clad hills—were like one long dream of beauty. Sometimes we lived on shore for a little while—in some obscure fishing village, where there was no one from England to ask who we were. We spent one long winter coasting about between Algiers and Tunis. I could hardly believe that it was winter in that world of purple sea and sky and almost perpetual sunshine. We spent half a year among the Greek islands—we stayed at

Constantinople—and sailed from there to Naples. It was at Naples I caught a fever, and lay ill on board the yacht. It was a tedious illness, a long night of darkness and delirium. When I recovered Colonel Tremayne was gone. He had left the yacht on the first day of my unconsciousness, leaving me in charge of a sister of mercy and three sailors. He had sold the yacht, which was to pass into the new owner's possession as soon as I was strong enough to go on shore. He left me a letter, telling me that he had deposited fifty pounds for me at the English bankers where he had been in the habit of cashing cheques. I had been at the bank with him on more than one occasion. He advised me to stay in the South, and get a situation as governess in an Italian family. He was obliged to go back to England on account of monetary difficulties, but he hoped to be able to meet me later. He did not even take the trouble to tell me where a letter would find him. He had abandoned me at the beginning of a dangerous illness—left me to live or die—friendless in a foreign land."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Poor wretches that depend
On greatness' favour dream as I have done,
Wake and find nothing."

Lord Cheriton heard the story of his daughter's fate in silence. It was an old and a common story, and any words of reprobation uttered now would have seemed a mockery from the lips of the father who had allowed his daughter's seducer to go unpunished.

"What did you do in your loneliness?" he asked, after a pause.

"I wandered from village to village for some months, living as the peasants live. I did not take Colonel Tremayne's advice, and offer myself as a teacher of youth. I did not try to enter a respectable home under a false character. I lived among peasants and as they lived, and my money lasted a long time. I had always been fond of needlework, so I bought some materials before I left Naples, and I used to sit in the olive woods, or by the sea shore, making baby linen, which I was able to dispose of when my wanderings brought me to Genoa, where I lived in a garret all through the winter after my illness. I remained in Italy for more than a year, and then my heart sickened of the beauty of the sea and sky, the streets of palaces, the orange groves and olive woods, the bright monotony of loveliness. Some of my own misery seemed to have mixed itself with all that was loveliest in that Southern world, and I felt as if grey skies and dull streets would be a relief to me. So I came to London, and found this lodging, and have managed to live—as you see—ever since. I have no wish to live any better. I have only one friend in the world. I have no desire to change. If my mother cared for me and wanted me I would go to her—but she never wanted me in the past, and I doubt if she will ever want me in the future."

"Your mother is a most unhappy woman, Mercy, and she has made her unhappiness a part of my life, and a part of other lives. She left her home this morning, alone, without giving any one notice where she was going, or why she was going. I am full of fear about her. My only hope was to find her here."

"And not having found her here, what are you going to do? Where will you look for her?"

"I don't know. I am altogether at fault. She had no friends in London, or anywhere else. She had isolated herself most completely. At Cheriton she was respected, but she made no friends. How could she make friends in a place where her whole existence was a secret? Ah, Mercy, have compassion upon me in my trouble—give me something of a child's love, for the burden of my sin is too heavy for me to bear."

He sank into a chair, covering his face with his hands, and she knew that the strong man was crying like a child.

Her heart was touched by his distress, as a woman if not as a daughter.

"I am sorry for you in your trouble," she said, in a low voice, "and I would gladly help you if I could. But I cannot forget my mother's broken heart—the slow torture of long years. I had to look on and see her suffer, not even knowing the cause of her sorrow, utterly unable to comfort her. Sorrow had hardened her. She was hard to me, a hard task-mistress rather than a mother. And now you tell me she has gone away, no one knows where. What can I do to help you and her?"

"God knows if you can do anything, Mercy," he answered, looking up at her gently, relieved somewhat by those unaccustomed tears.

He took her hand, which she did not withhold from him.

"Sit down, Mercy," he said, "sit here by my side, and let us consider calmly what we can do. Your mother has no friends to whom she could go, no one, unless it were Miss Newton."

"Miss Newton," cried Mercy. "What does my mother know of Miss Newton?"

"They were acquainted many years ago, but your mother would hardly go to her now."

"My mother knew Miss Newton, my one friend?"

"Yes, long ago. How did you come to know her?"

"She sought me out. It is the business of her life to seek out those who have most need of her, to whom her friendship can do most good. She heard of me from a girl who lives in this house, and she came to me and invited me to her lodgings, and brightened my life by her kindness. And did she really know my mother, years ago?"

"Yes, more than thirty years ago, when they were both young."

"How strange that is."

"I am thinking, Mercy; I am trying to think what refuge your mother could have found in London? Remember I have to think of her as of one who is scarcely accountable for her actions. I have to think of her as under the influence of one fixed idea—not governed by the same laws that govern other people."

"I am powerless to help you," answered Mercy, hopelessly. I will do anything you tell me to do—but of all people in this world I am least able to advise you. I know nothing of my mother's life except as I saw it at Cheriton—one long weariness."

"You shall know all by-and-by; all. I will stand before you as a criminal before his judge. I will lay bare my heart to you as a penitent before his father-confessor—and then perhaps, when you have heard the whole story, you will take compassion upon me—you will understand how hard a part I had to play—and that I was not altogether vile. I will say no more about your life here, and your future life, as I would have it, until that confession has been made. Then it will remain for you to decide whether I am worthy to be treated in somewise as a father."

She sat in silence, with her head bent over her folded hands. He looked at the dejected droop of the head, the grey threads in the auburn hair, the hollow cheek, the attenuated features and wan complexion, and remembered how brilliant a creature she had been in the first bloom of her beauty, and with what furtive apprehensive glances he, her father, had admired that girlish face. She was handsomer in those days than ever her mother had been, with a softer, more refined loveliness than the Strangway type. And he had let this flower grow beside his gate like a weed, and be trampled under foot like a weed; and now the face bore upon it all the traces of suffering, the lines about the mouth had taken the same embittered look that he remembered only too well in Evelyn Darcy, that look of silent protest against Fate.

He watched her for some minutes in an agony of remorse. She was his daughter, and it had been his duty to shelter her from the storms of life—and he had let the storms beat upon that undefended head, he had let her suffer as the nameless waifs of this world have to suffer, uncared for, unavenged.

If she should ever be brought to forgive him, could he ever forgive himself?

But he had nearer anxieties than these sad thoughts of that which might have been and that which was. He had the missing woman to think of, and the evil that might come to herself or others from her being at large. He had to speculate upon her motive in leaving Cheriton.

Perhaps it was only a natural result of his interview with her yesterday afternoon, when he had shown her the pistol, and told her where it had been found, that pistol which he and she knew so well —one of a pair that had been in her husband's possession at the time of her marriage—which had been pledged while they were living in Essex Street, and when their funds were at the lowest. She had kept the duplicate, with other duplicates which Darcy's carelessness abandoned to her—and afterwards some womanish

apprehension of danger in the somewhat isolated cottage in Camberwell Grove—some talk of burglarious attacks in the neighbourhood—had induced her to redeem the pistols, and they had been kept in their case on the table beside her bed for years. No burglar had ever troubled the quiet cottage, where there was neither plate-chest nor jewel-case to tempt an attack. The pistols had never been used. They had been packed up with other things and stored in the Pantechnicon, and James Dalbrook had forgotten the existence of Captain Darcy's revolvers till the builder's foreman showed him the pistol that had been found in the well. Then there came back upon him, in a flash, the memory of the case that had stood beside his bed, and the fact that the pistols had been sent down to Cheriton with Mrs. Darcy's other goods. That pistol could not have passed out of her possession without her knowledge and consent. If hers was not the hand that pulled the trigger, she must, at least, have furnished the weapon, and she must have known the murderer.

He told her as much as this, yesterday afternoon, when he showed her the pistol. She heard him in dogged silence, looking at him with wide-open eyes, in which the dilatation of the pupil never altered. She neither admitted nor denied anything. He could extort no answer from her, except some scornful and evasive retort. And so he left her in despair, having warned her that discovery was now a question of time. The finding of the pistol would put the police on the right track, and link by link the chain of circumstantial evidence would be fitted together.

"You had better tell me the truth, and let me help you, if I can," he told her.

She had acted upon his warning perhaps, but without his help. It was like her perverse nature to go out into the world alone, to make a mysterious disappearance just at the time when suspicion might at any moment be directed towards her, just when it was most essential that there should be not the slightest deviation from the sluggish course of her every-day life.

Lord Cheriton started up suddenly.

"Yes, that is at least an idea," he muttered. "Good-bye, Mercy. I have thought of a place where your mother might possibly go—a place associated with her past life. It is a forlorn hope, but I may as well look for her there. Wherever and whenever I find her you will come to her, will you not, if she should need your love?"

"Of course I will go to her—and if she has no other shelter I can bring her here. I should not be afraid to work for her."

"It is cruel of you to talk of working for her. You know that the want of money has never been an element in her troubles. She might have lived an easy and refined life among pleasant people if she would have been persuaded by me. As it was, I did what I could to make her life comfortable."

"Yes, I know she had plenty of money. She gave me expensive masters, as if she had been a woman of fortune. I used to wonder how she could afford it. We lived very simply, almost like hermits, but there seemed always money for everything she wanted. Our clothes, our furniture, and books seemed far too good for our station. I used to wonder who and what we were; and I have been asked questions sometimes about my former home. What did I remember of my childhood? Where had I lived before my father died? I could tell people nothing. I only remembered a cottage among fields, and the faces of the woman who nursed me and her children who played with me. I remembered nothing but the cottage, and the great cornfields, and the lanes and hedgerows, till one summer day my mother came in a carriage, and took me on a journey by the railroad—a journey that lasted a long time, for we had to wait and change trains more than once—and in the evening I found myself at Cheriton. That was all of my life that I could recall, and I did not even know the name of the woman with whom I lived till I was seven years old, or of the village near her cottage."

"You were hardly used, Mercy; but it was not all my fault."

He would not tell her that it was his wish to have her reared at Myrtle Cottage, where he would have watched her infancy and childhood; he would not tell her that it was the mother's sensitiveness, her resentful consciousness of her false position, which had banished the child.

"You will come to me whenever I summon you, Mercy?" he said.

"Yes, I will come."

He held out his hand, and she gave him hers, which was cold as death. He drew her to his breast, and kissed the pallid, care-worn forehead, and so they parted, father and daughter, the daughter acknowledged for the first time at seven-and-twenty years of age.

Lord Cheriton hailed the first hansom he found upon his way, and told the man to drive him to Camberwell Grove.

The neighbourhood through which he went was curiously unfamiliar after the changes and forgetfulness of twenty years; and yet it was curiously familiar to him, and brought back the memory of that dead time, when a man who was himself, and yet not himself, had gone to and fro that road until its every shop-front and every street corner seemed engraven upon his brain.

It is a busy, teeming world—a world of seething humanity, jostling, striving, anxious, hollow-cheeked and eager-eyed. He had chosen to plant his hidden Eden upon "the Surrey side," and had gone to and fro by that squalid highway with a contented spirit, because it was a world in which he was least likely to meet any of his professional brotherhood. What other barrister in decent

practice, what other Queen's Counsel, above all, was likely to pitch his tent at Camberwell? There might be old-fashioned men who would be content to grow their early cucumbers, and gloat over their pines and peaches in some citizen's paradise on Clapham Common. There might be men who would resign themselves to life at Wandsworth; but where was the spirit so lowly within the precincts of the Lamb who would stoop to live in a place which was accessible only by the Elephant and Castle and the Walworth Road? Do not the very names of those places stink in the nostrils of gentility? The Elephant has never held up his trunk since the glories of the Queen's Bench departed, since Ichabod was written on those walls against which Lord Huntingtower played rackets, and in whose shadow so many of Earth's great ones have paced up and down in the days when the noble debtor was still a person apart and distinguished, not amenable to the laws which govern the bankrupt trader.

He had borne with the Walworth Road because it lay so far out of gentility's track. The very odour of the neighbourhood was familiar—the reek of cooked meats and stale vegetables, blended with all-pervading fumes of beer. But there were numerous changes. He missed familiar shops and well-remembered features. All that had been shabby of old looked still shabbier to-day. How often he had tramped those pavements, economizing the cost of a cab, and not caring to rub shoulders with the habitués of the knife-board on Atlas or Waterloo. The walk had suited him. He could think out the brief read overnight as he tramped to Westminster in the morning. How well he remembered the cool breath of the river blowing up the Westminster Road on bright spring mornings, when the flower-girls were offering violets and primroses at the street corners. How well he remembered the change to a cleaner and a statelier world when he had crossed the bridge—the solemn grandeur of Westminster Hall, the close, sickly atmosphere of the crowded courts. Looking back he wondered how he bore the monotony of that laborious life, forgetting that he had been borne up and carried along by his ambition, always looking onward to the day when his name and fortune should be made, and he should taste the strong wine of success. He remembered what an idle dream Evelyn's idea of buying the Cheriton estate had seemed to him when first she mooted it; how he had talked of it only to indulge her fancy, as one discusses impossible things with a child; and how by slow degrees the notion of its feasibility had crept into his mind; how he had begun to calculate the possibilities of his future savings; how he had covered stray half-sheets of paper with elaborate calculations, taking pleasure in the mere figures as if they were actual money. He remembered how, when he had saved five thousand pounds, a rabid eagerness to accumulate took hold of him,

and with what keen eyes he used to look at the figures on a brief. He had caught the infection of Evelyn's sanguine temper, and of Evelyn's parsimonious habits. They used to hang over his bank-book sometimes of an evening, as Paolo and Francesca hung over the story of Launcelot, calculating how much could be spared to be placed on deposit, how little they could contrive to live on for the next quarter. As the hoard increased Evelyn grew to grudge herself the smallest luxury, a few flowering plants for the drawing-room, a day's hire of the jobbing gardener, a drive in a hansom to Richmond or Greenwich, little pleasures that had relieved the monotony of their isolation.

"My father cannot live many years," she told James Dalbrook, "and when he dies the estate will have to be sold. I have often heard him say so."

Mr. Dalbrook went on a stolen journey to Cheriton, and saw every bit of the estate which he could get to see. He was careful to say nothing of this expedition to Evelyn lest she should want to go with him, as he felt that her presence would have been a difficulty. Some one might have recognized the Squire's young daughter in the mature woman.

He went back to London passionately in love with the property, which he remembered as one of the paradises of his boyhood, in the days when he had been fond of long excursions on foot to Corfe, or Swanage, or the great sunburnt hills by the sea. He saw Cheriton Chase now with the entranced eyes of an ambitious man to whom territorial possession seemed the crowning glory of life.

He had saved ten thousand pounds, very little compared with the sum which would be required; but he told himself that when he had amassed another ten he might feel secure of being able to buy the estate, since it would be easy to raise seventy per cent. of the purchase money on mortgage. He began to see his way to the realization of that dream. He would have to go on living laborious days—to go on with those habits of self-denial which had already become a second nature—even after the prize was won; but he saw himself the owner of that noble old house, amidst a park and woodland that were the growth of centuries; and he thought of the delight of restoring and improving and repairing, after fifty years of slipshod poverty and gradual decay.

And now, as the hoard increased to twelve, fifteen, eighteen thousand, James Dalbrook began to talk to his companion of their future ownership of Cheriton as a certainty. They planned the rooms they were to occupy; they allotted their small stock of furniture about the old mansion house—things they had bought by slow degrees in the happy hunting-grounds of Wardour Street and the Portland Road, and which were all good of their kind. They discussed the number of servants that they could manage to carry on

with for the first few years, while economy would still be needful. It was understood between them, though rarely spoken about, that Tom Darcy would be dead before that fruition of their dreams. He had been sent off to Canada, a broken man. Who could doubt that a few years more would see the end of that worthless existence? And then the bond between those two who had held to each other so faithfully would be realized, and Evelyn could go back to the house in which she was born, its proud and happy mistress.

She had fed upon those dreams, lived upon them, had thought of little else in her solitary days, in the isolation of her home. She had put away her child with stern resolve that no difficulty should arise out of *that* existence when she came to take her place in society as James Dalbrook's wife. She never meant to acknowledge the daughter born at Myrtle Cottage. She would do her duty to the child somehow; but not in that way.

Lord Cheriton remembered all these things as the cab rattled along the Walworth Road. Our waking thoughts have sometimes almost the rapidity of our dreams. He surveyed the panorama of the past; recalled the final bitterness of that meeting at Boulogne, when he went over to see Mrs. Darcy, and when he had to tell her that he was master of Cheriton Chase, by the help of his wife's dowry, and that he had begun life there on a far more dignified footing than they two had contemplated.

She received the announcement with sullen silence, but he could see that it hurt her like the thrust of a sword. She stood before him with a lowering brow, white to the lips, her thin fingers twisting themselves in and out of each other with a convulsive moment, and one corner of the bloodless under lip caught under the sharp white teeth fiercely.

"Well," she said at last, "I congratulate you. Cheriton has a new master; and if the lady of the house is not the woman whose shadow I used to see there in my dreams—it matters very little to you. You are the gainer in all ways. You have got the place you wanted; and a fair young wife instead of a faded—mistress."

She lifted up her eyes, pale with anguish, and looked at him with an expression he had never been able to forget.

He was silent under this thrust, and then, after a troubled pause, he asked her if she had made up her mind where her future days were to be spent. He was only desirous to see her settled in some pretty neighbourhood, in the nicest house that she could find for herself, or that he could choose for her.

"Do not let money be any consideration," he said. "My fees are rolling in very fast this year, and they are big fees. I want to see you happily circumstanced, with Mercy."

"There is only one place I care to live in," she answered, "and that is Cheriton Chase."

He told her, with a sad smile, that Cheriton was the only place that was impossible for her.

"It is not impossible. Do you think I want to be a fine lady, or to tell people that I was once Evelyn Strangway? I only want to live upon the soil I love—and to see you, sometimes, as you go past my door. There is the West Lodge, now—one of the most picturesque old cottages in England. I loved it when I was a girl. Sally Newton and I used to picnic there, when my father and I were not on speaking terms. Who is living in that cottage now?"

"One of the gardeners."

"Turn out the gardener and let me live there."

He rejected the idea as preposterous, degrading, that she should live at the lodge gates, she who had once been the Squire's daughter.

"Do not talk to me of degradation," she answered, bitterly. "There will be no degradation for me in living at your gates, now that you and I are strangers. My degradation belongs to the past. Nothing in the future can touch me. I am nameless henceforward, a nullity."

"But if you should be recognized there?"

"Who is there to recognize me? Do you think there is one line or one look of Evelyn Strangway's sixteen-year-old face left in my face to-day?"

Knowing the portrait in the hall at Cheriton he was fain to confess that the change was complete. It would have been difficult for any one to find the lines of that proud young beauty in the careworn features and sunken cheeks of the woman who stood before him now. The months that had gone by since their parting had aged her as much as if they had been years.

"If your husband should find you there?"

"Not likely! It is the very last place in which he would look for me; and the chances are against his ever returning to England."

"Why is your mind set upon living at Cheriton?"

"Why? Because I have dreamt and thought of that place till my love for it has become almost a disease; because I have not the faintest interest in any other spot upon earth. I don't care how I live there. I have no pride left in me. Pride, self-respect, care for myself died a sudden death one day you know of, when I found that you had ceased to care for me, when I awoke from a long dream and knew that my place in life was lost. I shall be content to vegetate in that cottage—and—and if you think I ought to have Mercy with me, why Mercy can be there too. I shall be Mrs. Jones, or Mrs. Brown, and there can be no particular reason why Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Brown should not have a daughter."

She was so earnest, so intent, so resolute upon this and nothing

else than this, that he was constrained to yield to her wishes, and once having yielded, he did all in his power to make her life comfortable and free from humiliation. He had the cottage as tastefully restored as if he had been going to occupy it himself; he opened an account for Mrs. Porter at a Dorchester Bank, and paid in four hundred pounds to her credit, and he told her that the same amount would be paid in yearly on the 1st of January. There should be nothing uncertain or pinched in her circumstances.

This being done, he resigned himself as best he might to bear the burden of that unwelcome presence at his gates. He and the woman who was to have been his wife rarely spoke to each other during those long slow years in which the master of Cheriton grew in honour and dignity and in the respect of his fellow-men. He whose career Evelyn Darcy had watched from the very dawn of success was now a personage, a man of mark in his native county, a man who could afford to hold out the hand of friendship to his less distinguished relatives, and who could afford to confess himself the son of a small shopkeeper in the county town.

Lady Cheriton had been inclined to interest herself in the lonely woman at the West Lodge. She was impressed by the unmistakable refinement of Mrs. Porter's appearance, and wanted to befriend her; but Lord Cheriton had forbidden any friendly relations between his wife and the lodge-keeper, on the ground that she was a woman of very peculiar temper, that she would resent anything like patronage, and that she would infinitely prefer being left alone to being taken up or petted. The tender-hearted Maria, always submissive to the husband she adored, had obeyed without question; but some years after, when Mercy was growing up and being educated by the best masters available in the neighbourhood, Lady Cheriton had taken a fancy to the hard-worked girl, and had interested herself warmly in her progress; and thus it had happened that although Mrs. Porter never was known to cross the threshold of the great house, her daughter went there often, and was made much of by Lady Cheriton, and admired by Juanita, whose accomplishments were still in embryo, while Mercy was far advanced in music and modern languages.

"I suppose her mother means her to go out as a governess by-and-by," Lady Cheriton told her husband. "She is over-educated for any other walk in life, and in any case she is over-worked. I feel very sorry for her when I see how tired she looks sometimes, and how anxious she is about her studies. Juanita must never be allowed to toil like that."

Lord Cheriton remembered all that had happened with reference to the woman who called herself Mrs. Porter, in all these long years —his daughter Juanita's lifetime. She had seen the funeral trains

of his infant sons pass through the gate beside her cottage—she had seen the little coffins covered with snow-white flowers, and she must have known the bitterness of his disappointment. She had lived at the West Lodge for all these years, and had made no sign of a rebellious heart, of anger, jealousy, or revengeful feeling. He had believed that she was really content so to live; that in granting what she had asked of him he had satisfied her, and that her sense of wrong was appeased. At first he had lived in feverish apprehension of some outbreak or scene—some revelation made to the wife he loved, or to the friends whose esteem he valued; but as the years went by without bringing him any trouble of this kind, he had ceased to think with uneasiness of that sinister figure at his gates.

And now by the light of the hideous confession which he carried in his breast pocket he knew that in all those years she had been cherishing her sense of wrong, heaping up anger and revenge and malice and every deadly feeling engendered of disappointed love, against the day of wrath. Could he wonder if her mind had given way under that slow torture, until the concealed madness of years culminated in an act of wild revenge—a seemingly motiveless crime? Heaven knows by what distorted reasoning she had arrived at the resolve to strike her deadly blow there rather than elsewhere. Heaven knows what sudden access of malignity might have been caused by the spectacle of the honeymoon lovers and their innocent bliss.

The cab had turned into Camberwell Grove, and now he asked himself if it were not the wildest fancy to suppose that she might have gone back to Myrtle Cottage, or that she might be hanging about the neighbourhood of her old home. The cottage was in all probability occupied, and even if she had wandered that way she would most likely have come and gone before now. The idea had flashed into his mind as he sat in Mercy's room, the idea that in her distracted state all her thoughts might revert to the past, and that her first impulse might lead her to revisit the house in which she had lived so long.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"The love of these is like the lightning spear,
And shrivels whom it touches. They consume
All things within their reach, and, last of all,
Their lonely selves."

THE cottage was to be let. A board offering it upon a repairing lease announced the fact.

Lord Cheriton opened the familiar gate. The very sound with which it swung back as he passed recalled a life that was gone, that had left nothing but an exceeding bitter sorrow. How weedy and dejected the narrow garden looked in the sunshine—how moss-grown the gravel path which he and Evelyn had once taken such pains to weed and roll, in those early days when that modest suburban retreat seemed a happy home, and the demon of ennui had not yet darkened their threshold.

He entered the well-remembered porch over which the Virginia creeper hung in rank luxuriance. The house was not unoccupied, for slipshod feet came along the passage at the sound of the bell, and he heard children's voices in the back premises.

A slatternly woman, with a year-old baby on her left arm, opened the door.

"Has a lady called here this morning?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, there is a lady here now—in the drawing-room," the woman answered eagerly. "I hope you belong to her, for I've been feeling a bit nervous about her, with me and the children alone in the house, and my husband not coming back till night time. I'm afraid she's not quite right in her head."

"Yes, I belong to her. I have come to fetch her."

He went into the drawing-room—the room that had looked pretty and picturesque enough in those unforgotten days—a small room furnished with quaint old secretaire and bookcase, Chippendale chairs, and a carved oak table, a pair of old blue-and-white jars on the top of a dark mahogany bureau, a high, brass fender that used to glitter in the firelight, sober brown damask curtains, and half-a-dozen Bartolozzi engravings of rustic subjects, in neat oval frames—a room that always looked like a Dutch picture.

Now that room was a scene of squalor and desolation. For

furniture there was nothing but a shabby Pembroke table, wanting two castors, and two old cane-seated chairs, in each of which the cane was broken and bulging. A dilapidated doll, in a ragged red gauze frock, sprawled amidst the dirt on the bare floor, and a greasy rug lay in front of the fireless hearth.

Mrs. Porter was sitting with her elbows on the table, and her head resting on her clasped hands. She did not notice Lord Cheriton's approach till he was standing close beside her, when she looked up at him.

At first her gaze expressed trouble and bewilderment; then her face brightened into a quiet smile, a look of long ago.

"You are earlier than usual, James," she said, holding out her hand.

He took the hand in his; it was hot and dry, as if with a raging fever. It was the hand of a murderess; but it was also the hand of his victim, and he could not refuse to take it.

"Was your work over so soon to-day?" she asked. "I'm afraid it will be ever so long before dinner will be ready, and the house is all in a muddle—everything wretched"—looking about her with a puzzled air. "I can't think what has happened to the rooms," she muttered. "Servants are so troublesome."

She passed her hand across her forehead, as if her head were paining her, and then looked at him helplessly.

"You are ill, Evelyn," he said, gently.

It was twenty years since he had called her by the name that had been so often on his lips in this house. It was almost as if the very atmosphere of the house, even in its desolation, recalled the old link between them, and made him forgetful of what had happened in Dorsetshire.

"No. I have a headache, that is all. I shall set to work presently and make everything comfortable for you. Only I can't find Mary—I can't get on without Mary. I don't like the look of that charwoman—a wretched, untidy creature—and I don't know what she has done with the furniture. I suppose she moved it in order to clean the rooms. It is just like their tricks, clearing out the furniture and then dawdling ever so long before they begin to scrub the floors."

He looked at her earnestly, wondering whether she was pretending, whether she had repented that written acknowledgment of her crime, and was simulating madness. No, it was real enough. The eyes, with their dull fixed look and dilated pupils, the troubled movements of the hands, the tremulous lips, all told of the unsettled brain. There was but one course before him, to get her madness established as an accepted fact before there was any chance of her crime being discovered.

"Do not trouble about anything," he said, gently. "I will get

some of the furniture brought back presently, and I will get you a servant. Will you wait quietly here, while I see about two or three small matters?"

"Yes, I will wait; but don't be long. It seems such a long while since yesterday," she said, looking round the room in a forlorn way, "and everything is so strangely altered. Don't be long, if you *must* go out."

He promised to return in half an hour, and then he went out and spoke to the woman.

"How did she come here, and when?"

"She walked up to the door. It was just dinner-time—half-past twelve o'clock. I thought it was some one to see the house, so I let her in without asking any questions, and I showed her all the rooms, and it was some time before I saw she was wrong in her head. She looked about her just as people mostly do look, and she was very thoughtful, as if she was considering whether the place would suit. And then after she'd been a long time looking at the rooms and the garden, she went back into the drawing-room, and sat down at the table. I told her I should be glad if she could make it convenient to leave, as I had my washing to do. But she said she lived here, this was her home, and she told me to go away and get on with my work. She gave me such a scare that I didn't know how to answer her. She spoke very mild, and I could see that she was a lady; but I could see that she was out of her mind, and that frightened me, for fear she should take a violent turn, and I all alone in the house with those young children. I was afraid to contradict her, so I just let her please herself and sit in the drawing-room alone, while I got on with my bit of washing, and kept the children well out of the way. I never felt more thankful in my life than when you rang the bell."

"I am going as far as the post-office to send off some telegrams, and I want you to take care she doesn't leave this house while I'm away," said Lord Cheriton, emphasizing his request with a sovereign.

"Thank you kindly, sir. I'll do my best. I'm sure I'm sorry for her with all my heart, poor dear lady."

"And I want you to give me the use of this house for to-day—and possibly for to-night, if by any chance I should not be able to get her away to-night."

"Yes, sir, you are free and welcome to the house as far as it's mine to give leave—and it's been empty too long for there to be much chance of a tenant turning up between now and to-morrow."

"Very good. Then I shall send in a little furniture—just enough to make her comfortable for a few hours—and when I come back you can get her something to eat, and make her some tea."

"Yes, sir. You won't be gone long, I hope, for fear she should turn violent?"

"She will not do that. She has never been violent."

"I am very glad to hear that. Appearances are so deceitful sometimes when folks are wrong in their heads."

Lord Cheriton had told the cabman to wait. He got into the cab and drove to the nearest upholsterer's, where he hired a table, a comfortable sofa, a couple of chairs, a small square carpet, and some pillows and blankets, in the event of Mrs. Porter having to bivouac in Myrtle Cottage. He meant her only to leave that shelter for a place of restraint, under medical care.

This done, he went to the post-office and telegraphed first to Marian Gray, Hercules Buildings:—

"Your mother is at Myrtle Cottage, Camberwell Grove, and very ill. Go to her without delay.—CHERITON."

His second telegram was to Dr. Mainwaring, Welbeck Street:—

"Meet me as soon as possible at Myrtle Cottage, Camberwell Green, and send a trained nurse, experienced in mental cases, to the same address. I want your advice upon a case in which time is of vital importance."

He sent another telegram to another medical man, Dr. Wilmot, also an old acquaintance, and a fourth to Theodore Dalbrook, at the Priory:—

"Mrs. Porter is in London, and in my care. You need have no further apprehension."

He was back at Myrtle Cottage within the half-hour, and was able to direct the men who had just brought a small van containing the furniture. He saw the things carried into the room that had been the dining-room, which was empty—the policeman's family preferring to camp in the kitchen—and had them arranged there with some appearance of comfort. Then he went back to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Porter was standing at the window, staring at the weeping-ash.

"I didn't know the tree was so big," she muttered.

"The dining-room is in better order," he said, gently, "will you come and sit there, while they get you some tea?"

"Yes, James," she answered, meekly, and then she added, with almost the voice and manner of twenty years ago, "tell me about your day."

She followed him into the other room, and seated herself opposite him, looking at him expectantly. "Tell me about your day in the law courts. Was it dull or interesting? Had you any great case on? I forget. I forget."

She had always questioned him on his return from the law courts:

she had read the reports of all his cases, and all his rivals' cases, interesting herself in everything that concerned his career. And now there was so much of the past in her manner that his heart ached as he listened to her. He could not humour her delusion.

"I have sent for your daughter," he said gravely, thinking that name might bring her back to a sense of the present time. "She will be here before long, I believe. I hope you will receive her kindly."

"Why have you sent for her?" she cried, vexed and startled. "She is very well where she is—happy and well. The nurse told me so in her last letter. I can't have her here. You know that, James,—you know how people would talk by-and-by—how they would ferret out the truth—by-and-by, when we want to stand clear of the past——"

"Evelyn, the past is long past, and our child is a woman—a sorrowful woman. I want you to take her to your heart again, if you have any heart left in you."

"I have not," she cried, with a sudden change, appalling in its instantaneousness. "My heart died within me twenty years ago, when you broke it; in this house, yes, in this house, James Dalbrook, God help me! I have been dreaming! I thought I was living here again in the old time, and that you had come home to me, as you used to come, before you broke your promise and abandoned me to marry a rich young wife. Heart! No, I have a fiery scorpion here, where my heart used to be. Do you think if I had had a heart I could have killed *him*—that young man who never injured me by so much as one scornful word? It was the thought of your daughter that maddened me—the thought of her happiness, the sound of the church bells and the cheering, and the sight of the flags and garlands and laurel arches—while *my* daughter, your nameless, unacknowledged child, was an outcast, and I who should have been your wife, and the happy mother of just as happy a bride, I was living in that silent solitary cottage alone and unloved—upon the land where my father and his forefathers had been owners of the soil. I had dreamed the dream and you had realized it. All through those moonlight nights I was awake and roaming about in the park, from midnight till dawn, thinking, thinking, thinking, till I felt as if my brain must burst with the agony of thought. And then I remembered Tom Darcy's pistols, and I took one of them with me of a night. I hardly knew why I carried that pistol about with me, but I felt a necessity to kill something. Once I was near shooting one of the red deer, but the creature looked at me with its plaintive eyes, so bold and so tame in his sense of security, and I fondled him instead of killing him. And then I took to prowling about by the house, and I saw those two in the lamp-lit room, in their wedded happiness—their *wedded* happi-

ness, James, not such a union as ours, secret, darkened by a cloud of shame. I saw your daughter in her bright young beauty, the proud, triumphant wife: and then a devilish thought took hold of me—the thought of seeing her widowed, broken-hearted; the thought that I might be her evil Destiny—that just by stretching out my arm and pulling a trigger I could bring down all that pride into the dust—could bring youth and beauty down to my level of dull despair."

"It was a devilish thought."

"It was; but it was my thought all the same; for three days and three nights it was never absent from my mind, God knows how I got through the common business of the day—how the few people with whom I came in contact did not see murder in my face! I watched and waited for my opportunity; and when the moment came I did not waver. There are old people at Cheriton who could tell you that Evelyn Strangway at fifteen years old was as good a shot as either of her brothers. My hand had not forgotten its cunning; and your daughter was a widow three weeks after she was made a wife. By so much as she was happier than I, by so much was her joy briefer than mine."

She sank into a corner of the large armchair and covered her face with her hands, muttering to herself. He heard the words—"I made myself her Evil Destiny; I was her fate—Nemesis, Nemesis! The sins of the fathers! It is the Scripture."

He could not stay in the room with her after that confession. She had been perfectly coherent in telling the story of her crime; and it seemed to him that even now she gloated over the evil she had wrought—that had it been in her power to undo her work by the lifting of her hand she would hardly have used that power. She seemed a malignant spirit, rejoicing in evil.

He went out into the passage and told the policeman's wife to look after her, and then he went to the desolate drawing-room and walked up and down the bare boards waiting for the arrival of one or both of the doctors.

What would *they* think of her mental condition. She had been curiously coherent just now. The temporary delusion had passed away like a cloud. She had spoken as a person fully conscious of her acts, and accountable for them. Judged by her speech just now she was a criminal who deserved the sternest measure of the law.

But he who knew of those long years of brooding, he who knew the story of her wrongs, and how those wrongs must have acted upon that proud and stubborn spirit, to him there seemed little doubt that her mind had long lost its balance, and that her crime had been the culminating crisis of a long period of melancholia. He waited the verdict of the doctors with acutest anxiety, for only in an

asylum did he see safety for this unhappy sinner. The finding of the pistol would inevitably be talked about at Cheriton, and it was possible that at any moment suspicion might take the right direction. To get her away, to get her hidden from the world was his most ardent desire; but this was not inconsistent with his desire to spare her, to do the best that could be done for her. The thought that he had ruined her life—that his wrong-doing was at the root of all her miseries—was never absent from his mind.

Dr. Mainwaring was the first to arrive. He was a man of supreme refinement, gentle, compassionate, an artist by talent and temperament, intellectual to the tips of his fingers. He had made insanity and the care of the insane the work of his life, as his father and grandfather had done before him, and he enjoyed the privilege of having been born in an age of enlightenment, which they had not even foreseen in their happiest anticipations. He had met Lord Cheriton often in London society, and had visited him in the country, and they were as close friends as two busy men of the world can be.

He was mystified by so sudden a summons and to such a locality; but he had too much tact to betray any surprise. He listened quietly to Lord Cheriton's explanation that he was wanted to form an opinion of a dependent whose state of mind had given cause for uneasiness.

"I will say very little about her till you have seen her," said Cheriton. "If it should appear to you and to my friend Wilmot, whom I have asked to meet you,—if you should decide that she ought to be placed under restraint, I should wish her to be removed immediately to your house at Cheshunt. I know that she will be made as happy there as her state of mind will admit, and I shall rely upon your kind consideration for making this a special case."

"You may be assured I shall do my uttermost for any one in whom you are interested, my dear Cheriton, but indeed I think you must know that I do my uttermost in every case. It is only in some small details that I can ever show special attention. Is this poor lady very violent?"

"No, she is very quiet."

"And there is no suicidal mania, I hope?"

"I have seen no evidence of it; but she left her home in a strange and motiveless manner this morning, and that, coupled with other indications in the past, gave me the alarm."

"Has she any delusions?"

"Yes, it was under a delusion that she came to this empty house. She lived here many years ago, and on talking to her just now I found her unconscious of the lapse of time, and fancying that all things were still as they were when she was a young woman."

"Has she had any illness lately?"

"None that I know of."

"I fear there can be little doubt as to her malady. Will you take me to her? She will be less alarmed if you are with me. Oh, by the bye, the nurse you asked for will be here almost immediately."

"I am glad of that. There is only a wretched slattern in the house, whom I don't like to see in attendance upon my poor friend."

Lord Cheriton and the doctor went into the room, where Mrs. Porter was sitting facing the window, staring moodily at the trailing tendrils of Virginia creeper and passion-flower hanging from the roof of the verandah and shutting out the light. There was something unspeakably desolate in that glimpse of neglected garden seen athwart the neglected verdure, with the smoky London sky as a background.

She looked round quickly at the sound of footsteps, and started up from her chair.

"Who is this man?" she asked, turning to Lord Cheriton. "Are you going to send me to prison? You have lost no time."

"This gentleman is my old friend, and he is interested in helping you if he can."

"You had better leave us together," said Dr. Mainwaring, gently.

Lord Cheriton left the room silently, and paced the narrow entrance hall, listening with intense anxiety to the low murmuring sound of voices on the other side of the door.

There were no loud tones from either speaker. There could be neither anger nor profound agitation upon Mrs. Porter's side, the listener thought, as he awaited the result of the interview. A knock at the hall-door startled him from his expectancy, and he hastened to admit the new arrival.

It was his other medical friend, Dr. Wilmot, stout and jovial, more adapted to assist at a wedding than a funeral, more fitted to prescribe for wine-bibbing aldermen or dowagers who needed to be "kept up" on Rœderer or Mumm, than to stand beside the bed of agony, or listening to the ravings of a mind distraught. Mainwaring came out of the dining-room at the sound of voices in the hall.

"Ah, how do you do, Wilmot? You will have very little trouble in making up your mind about this poor soul. Go in and talk to her while I take a turn in the garden with his Lordship."

He opened the dining-room door, and Dr. Wilmot passed in, smiling, agreeable, and beginning at once in an oily voice, "My dear lady, my friend Mainwaring suggests that I should have a little chat with you while—while Lord Cheriton and he are admiring the garden. A very nice garden, upon my word, for the immediate vicinity of London. One hardly expects such a nice bit of ground

nowadays. May I feel your pulse? Thanks, a little too rapid for perfect health."

"What do you and that other man mean by all this pretence?" she exclaimed, indignantly. "I am not ill. Are you a doctor, or a policeman in disguise? If you want to take me to prison I am ready to go with you. I came to London on purpose to give myself up. You need not beat about the bush. I am ready."

"Mad, very mad," thought Dr. Wilmot, detaining the unwilling wrist, and noting its tumultuous pulsations by the second hand of his professional watch.

Lord Cheriton and Dr. Mainwaring were pacing slowly up and down the moss-grown gravel while this was happening.

"How did you find her?"

"Curiously calm and collected for the first part of the interview. Had it not been for her troubled eye, and the nervous movements of her hands, I should have supposed her as sane as you or I. I talked to her of indifferent subjects, and her answers were consecutive and reasonable, although it was evident she resented my presence. It was only when I asked her why she had come to London that she became agitated and incoherent, and began to talk about having committed a murder, and wishing to give herself up and make a full confession of her guilt. Instead of waiting for the law to find her out she was going to find the law. She had no fear of the result. She had long been tired of her life, and she was not afraid of the disgrace of a felon's death. Her whole manner, as she said this, showed a deep-rooted delusion, and I am of opinion that her mind has been unhinged for a long time. That notion of an imaginary crime is often a fixed idea in lunacy. A madman will conceive a murder that never took place, or he will connect himself with some actual murder, and insist upon his guilt, often with an extraordinary appearance of truth and reality, until he is shaken by severe cross-examination."

"You will receive her in your house at once?"

"I have no objection, if Wilmot's opinion coincides with mine; but another medical man must sign the certificate if she is to enter my house. I have no doubt as to her being in a condition to require restraint. She is not violent at present, but if she is not taken care of she will go wandering about in search of a police-magistrate, and with increasing excitement there will be every likelihood of acute mania. Ah, here comes Wilmot. Well, what do you think of the case, Wilmot?"

"Mad, undeniably mad. She took me for a policeman, and raved about a murder for which she wanted to give herself up to justice."

"A fixed delusion, you see," said Mainwaring, with a gentle sigh. "Do you know how long she has had this idea, Cheriton?"

"Indeed, I do not. Her position on my estate was a peculiar one. She lived at one of the lodges, but her status was not that of an ordinary dependent. She was her own mistress, and lived a very solitary life—after her daughter left her. I have sent for the daughter, who will be here presently, I hope. My first notice of anything amiss was a hint dropped by a young medical man who was visiting at Cheriton. He saw Mrs. Porter, and formed the opinion that she either had been off her head in the past, or was likely to go off her head in the future. That startled me, and I had it in my mind to ask you to come down to see her, Mainwaring, when there came the sudden departure of this morning—a departure which was so at variance with her former habits that it made me anxious for her safety. I followed her to London—first to her daughter's lodging—and then here—where by mere guesswork, I found her."

"Do you think that it may be the sad event of last year—the murder of your son-in-law—which has put this notion into her head?"

"It is not unlikely. That dreadful event made a profound impression upon everybody at Cheriton. She, being a reserved and thoughtful woman, may have brooded over it."

"Until she grew to associate herself with the crime," said Wilmot. "Nothing more likely. Was the murderer never found, by the way?"

"Never."

"But there can be no suspicion against this lady, I conclude. She can have been in no way concerned in the crime?"

"I think you have only to look at her in order to be satisfied upon that point," said Lord Cheriton; and the two physicians agreed that the poor lady in question was not of the criminal type, and that nothing was more common in the history of mental aberration than the hallucination to which she was a victim.

"Those monotonous lives of annuitants and genteel dependents—exempt from labour, and to the outward eye full of placid contentment, do not infrequently tend towards madness," said Dr. Wilmot. "I have seen more than one such case as this. There are some minds that have no need of action or variety, some natures which can vegetate in a harmless nullity. There are other tempers which prey upon themselves in solitude, and brood upon fancies till they lose touch of realities. This lady is of the latter type, highly organized, sensitive to a marked degree, of the *genus-irritabile*."

"You will take all necessary steps at once?" said Lord Cheriton, looking from one doctor to the other.

Both were consentient. Dr. Wilmot drove off at once to find the nearest medical man, and brought him back in his carriage. A very brief interview with the patient convinced this gentleman of the

necessity for gentle restraint, and the certificate was signed by him and Dr. Wilmot.

It was six o'clock, and the shadows were deepening in the room where Mrs. Porter was sitting, quiescent, silent, in a kind of apathy from which she was scarcely roused by the entrance of the nurse from Cheshunt, a tall comely-looking woman of about thirty, neatly dressed, and with pleasant manners.

Mrs. Porter sat there in her dull lethargy, the food that had been prepared for her untasted at her side. The nurse looked at the patient with a keen professional eye, and from the patient to the tray where an ill-cooked chop stagnated in a pool of grease; and where the unused teacup showed that even the feminine refreshment of tea had failed to tempt her.

"She hasn't eaten anything," said the nurse, "and she looks weak and wasted, as if she had been for a long time without food. You'd better send for some beef essence and a little brandy. She ought to be kept up somehow, if she is to be taken to Cheshunt to-night. It will be a long drive."

Lord Cheriton despatched the policeman's wife to the nearest chemist's and the nearest wine merchant's, while he went himself to a livery stable and ordered a brougham and pair to be at Myrtle Cottage at seven o'clock. The certificate had been signed, and there was nothing to hinder the removal of the patient. He found Mercy with her mother upon his return, but the mother had given no sign of recognition, and the daughter sorrowfully acknowledged the necessity of the case after Dr. Mainwaring had gently explained her mother's condition to her.

"I am not surprised," she said, with sad submission, "I saw it coming years ago. I have lain awake many a night when I was a girl listening to her footsteps as she walked up and down her bedroom, and to the heart-broken sigh that she gave every now and then, in the dead of the night, when she thought there was no one to hear her."

An hour later the woman who for twenty years had been known as Mrs. Porter, and who was to carry that name to her dying day, was on her way to The Grange, Cheshunt, with her daughter and the nurse in the carriage with her. She had made no resistance, had gone where she was asked to go, with an apathetic indifference, had given no trouble; but although her daughter had been with her for an hour, doing all that tender attention could do to awaken her memory, there had been not a word or a look from the mother to betoken consciousness of her existence.

Yet it was clear that the mental powers were only clouded, not extinguished; for, as Lord Cheriton stood a little way outside the porch watching her as she passed out to the carriage, she stopped suddenly and looked at him.

"Will you and I ever meet again, James Dalbrook?" she asked solemnly.

He paled at the address in those clear, incisive tones, dreading what she might say next.

"I think it may be better we should not meet," he said gloomily. "I have placed you in the care of those who will do the best that can be done for you."

"You are sending me to a madhouse, in the care of a mad doctor. That is your substitute for Cheriton Chase; the home I used to dream about ages ago, in this house; the home you and I were to have shared as man and wife. It was my birth-place, James, and I would to God it had been my grave before I ever looked upon your face!"

The nurse hustled her charge into the carriage, muttering something about "delusions;" but Dr. Mainwaring was too shrewd a student of humanity not to perceive some meaning in these consecutive utterances. He had no doubt that Mrs. Porter was deranged, and a person who would be the better for the moderate restraint of a well-ordered asylum: but he had also no doubt that she had her lucid intervals, and that in this farewell speech she had let in the light upon her past relations with James Dalbrook, first Baron Cheriton.

That revelation accounted for some points in the law-lord's conduct which had hitherto been incomprehensible to his friend the doctor.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Mine after-life! what is mine after-life?
My day is closed! the gloom of night is come!
A hopeless darkness settles o'er my fate!"

It seemed to Lord Cheriton as he drove to Victoria Street in Dr. Mainwaring's brougham, that the day which had just come to an end had been the longest day of his life. He looked back at the sunny morning hour in which he had lingered over the business of the toilet, brooding upon that discovery of the pistol, his spirits weighed down by a vague foreboding, a dim horror of approaching evil, scarcely able to measure the extent of his own fears. He recalled the moment at which his valet brought him Theodore's brief summons to the West Lodge—a moment that had given new reality to all he dreaded — a summons which told him that the shadowy horror which had been beside his pillow all through the night was going to take a tangible shape. Oh, God, how long it seemed since that pencilled line was put into his hand—since he stood in the blinding sunshine staring at the curt summons—before he recovered himself so far as to turn to his servant with his habitual grave authority, and give some trivial order about his overcoat.

Since then what slow agonies of apprehension—what self-abasement before the daughter whom he met for the first time as his daughter, face to face! What terror lest the woman whom his perfidy had driven to madness and to crime should be called upon to answer to the law for that crime—while England should ring with the story of *his* treachery, and *his* hidden sin! He felt as if he had lived through half a life-time of shame and agony between the vivid light of the August morning and the cool grey shadows of the August night. He leant back in his corner of the cosy little brougham, pale and dumb, a worn-out man, and his friend the physician respected his silence.

"Will you come home and dine with me, Cheriton?" said Dr. Mainwaring, as they crossed the bridge. "It may be pleasanter for you than the solitude of your own rooms."

"You are very good. No, I am not fit for society, not even for yours. I am deeply indebted to you—I feel that you are indeed

my friend—and that you will do all that can be done to make that broken life yonder endurable."

"You may be sure of that. I would do as much were Mrs. Porter a nameless waif whom I had found by the road side; but as your friend she will have an unceasing interest for me. Shall you stay long enough in town to be able to spare time to go and see her at the Grange?"

"No, I must go back to Dorsetshire to-morrow. I doubt if I shall ever see her again. Accept that fact as the strongest proof of my confidence in you. Had I any doubt as to her treatment I would see her from time to time, at whatever cost of pain to myself."

"There is nothing but pain, then, in your present feeling about that poor lady?"

"Nothing but pain."

"And yet—forgive me if I touch an old wound—I think you must once have loved her?"

The shadows were deepening, the lamps shone with faint yellow light upon the grey stone parapet, and the interior of the carriage was very dark. Perhaps it was the darkness which emboldened Dr. Mainwaring to push his inquiry to this point.

"You are right," his friend answered slowly. "I loved her once."

The brougham stopped at his lordship's door in Victoria Street, and then drove northwards with the physician. There was time for much serious reflection between Westminster and Welbeck Street.

"My new patient must be carefully looked after," mused the doctor, "for I'm afraid there's more meaning in her self-accusation than there generally is in such cases, and that Sir Godfrey Carmichael's murderer is now in my keeping."

The long August day passed very quietly at Milbrook Priory. Lady Cheriton arrived in the afternoon, and the three generations spent the summer hours on the lawn, mother and daughter sitting at work under the tulip trees, grandson and nurse in that state of perpetual motion which is infancy's only alternative with perpetual slumber.

Theodore spent his afternoon in a somewhat restless fashion, and appeared as if possessed by a rage for locomotion. He rambled about the grounds, explored the shrubberies, and every yard of the plantation that girdled the little park. He went to both lodges, and talked to the caretaker at each. He made two different excursions to the village, on pretence of making inquiries at the Post Office, but in reality with the idea of meeting with, or hearing of, Mrs. Porter, should she have wandered that way. He behaved like a

member of the secret police who had been charged with the guardianship of the most precious life in the land; and if his movements betrayed the nervous anxiety of the amateur, rather than the business-like tranquillity of the professional, he made up in earnestness for what he lacked in training and experience.

It was on his return from his second sauntering perambulation of the village that he found Lord Cheriton's telegram waiting for him at the Priory. The relief that message brought was unspeakable, and his countenance showed the change in his feelings when he rejoined the two ladies on the lawn.

"Something very pleasant must have happened to you, Theodore," said Juanita. "You have been looking the picture of gloom all day, and now you are suddenly radiant. Have you been talking to one of the Vicar's pretty daughters?"

"No, Juanita; neither of those wax-doll beauties glorified my path. I heard their treble voices on the other side of the holly-hedge as I passed the Vicarage, and I'm afraid they were quarrelling. I have had good news from London."

"From my father?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Theodore, why do you torture me by hiding things from me? Something has happened, I know."

"You will know all in a few days, Juanita. Thank God, a great fear that has haunted me for some time past is now at an end. I can look at you and your child without seeing the shadow of an enemy across your path."

She looked at him searchingly.

"All this amounts to nothing," she said. "I have never feared for myself or thought of myself. Will my husband's death be avenged, and soon, soon, soon? That is the question."

"That is a question which you yourself may be called upon to answer—and very soon," he said.

He would say no more, in spite of her feverish eagerness, her impatient questionings.

"I have changed my mind, Juanita," he said presently. "I will not bore you with my company till I am free to answer your questions. The motive for my presence in this house is at an end.

"Is it? What has become of the suspicious characters my father talked about?"

"The danger has not come this way—as he feared it might."

"Stay," she said. "Whether there is danger or not you are going to stay. I will not be played fast and loose with by any visitor. Mother likes to have you here, and baby likes you."

"Not so well as he likes Cuthbert Ramsay," retorted Theodore, with almost involuntary bitterness.

This time Juanita's blush was an obvious fact.

She walked away from her cousin indignantly.

"You may go or stay, as you please," she said; and he stayed, stayed to be a footstool under her feet if she liked—stayed with a heart gnawed by jealousy, consumed by despair.

"It is useless—hopeless beyond the common measure of hopelessness," he told himself. "She never cared for me in the past, and she will never care for me in the future. I am doomed to stand for ever upon the same dull plane of affectionate indifference. If I were dangerously ill she would nurse me; if I were in difficulties she would load me with benefits; if I were dead she would be sorry for me; but she is fonder of Ramsay, whom she has seen half a dozen times in her life, than she will ever be of me."

Lord Cheriton returned to Dorsetshire on the following afternoon. He drove from Wareham to the Priory, and had a long *tête-à-tête* with Theodore in the garden before dinner.

"You have acted for my daughter throughout this miserable business," he said, when he had told all that was to be told about Mrs. Porter's seclusion at Cheshunt. "She has confided in you more completely even than in me—her father, and I leave my cause in your hands. You must plead to the daughter for the erring father, whose sin has exercised a fatal influence upon her life. Win her forgiveness for me—win her pity for that most unhappy woman, if you can. It is a difficult task which I entrust to you, Theodore, but I believe in your power to move that generous heart to mercy."

"You may believe in my devotion to you both," said Theodore, and Lord Cheriton left the Priory without seeing his wife and daughter, who had gone to dress for dinner just before his arrival, and who came to the drawing-room presently, both expecting to find him there.

Theodore explained his hasty departure as best he might.

"Your father drove over to speak to me upon a matter of business," he said to Juanita. "He was tired after his journey, and preferred going home to dine."

"He was not ill, I hope?" cried Lady Cheriton, with a look of alarm.

"No, there is nothing amiss with him, except fatigue."

Juanita looked at him intently, eager to question him, but the butler's entrance to announce dinner stopped her, and she told Theodore to give his arm to her mother, and followed them both to the dining-room.

The meal was a mockery as far as two out of the three were concerned. Juanita was nervous and ill at ease, impatient of the lengthy ceremonial. Theodore ate hardly anything, but kept up a slip-shod conversation with Lady Cheriton, talked about the grand-

child's abnormal intelligence, and assured her in reply to her reiterated inquiries that her husband was not ill, was not even looking ill, and that there was no reason for her to go back to the Chase that night, as she was disposed to do.

Juanita rose abruptly before the grapes and peaches had been taken round.

"Would you mind coming to my room at once, Theodore?" she said. "I want half an hour's talk with you about—business. You will excuse my leaving you, won't you, mother?"

"My dear child, I shall be glad to get half an hour in the nursery. Boyle tells me that little rascal is never so lively as just before he settles down for the night."

Lady Cheriton went off in one direction, Juanita and Theodore in the other.

The lamp was lighted in the study, on the table where two rows of books told of the widow's studious solitude.

Theodore glanced at the titles of those neatly arranged volumes and saw that they were mostly upon scientific subjects.

"I did not know that you were fond of science, Juanita?" he said.

"I am not. I used to hate it. I am as ignorant as a baby. I don't believe I know any more about the moon than Juliet did when she accused it of inconstancy. Only when one comes to my age one ought to improve one's self. Godfrey will be asking me questions before I am much older—and when he wants to know whether the earth goes round the sun or the sun round the earth, I must be prepared to answer him."

She spoke with a nervous air, facing him in the soft clear lamplight, her hand upon the row of books, her eyes eager and questioning.

"You have seen my father, Theodore. Is the embargo removed?"

"It is."

"And you know who murdered my husband?"

"So far as the assassin's own confession is to be believed, yes."

"He has confessed—he is in prison—he will be hanged," she cried breathlessly.

"The murderer has confessed—but is not in prison—and will not be hanged—at least I trust not, in God's mercy."

"You are full of pity for a murderer, Theodore," she cried bitterly. "Have you no pity for my husband? Is his death to go unpunished? Is his life—the life that might have been as long as it was happy—is that to count for nothing?"

"It is to count for much, Juanita. Believe me, your husband is avenged. His death was a sacrifice to a broken heart and a disordered brain. The hand that killed him is the hand of one who cannot be called to account—the hand of a madwoman."

"A woman?"

"Yes, a woman. The woman you have seen many a time as you passed in and out of Cheriton Chase in your father's carriage by the West Gate."

"Mrs. Porter?"

"Yes."

"Great God! why did she kill my husband?"

"Because she was unhappy—because she had suffered until sorrow had obscured her intellect, till her life had become one long thirst to do evil—one hatred of youth and beauty, and innocent gladness like yours. She saw you in your wedded happiness, and she thought of a happiness which was once her own day dream—the hope and dream of patient, self-denying years. She struck at you through your husband. She struck at your father through you."

"My father! What was he to her—ever, except a friend and benefactor?"

"He was once more than that to Evelyn Strangway."

"Strangway!" shrieked Juanita, clasping her hands. "Did I not tell you so from the first? It was the footstep of a Strangway that crept past our window, while we sat together in our happiness, without thought of peril. It was a Strangway who killed my husband. You told me that they were all dead and gone—that the race was extinct—that the people I feared were phantoms. I told you it was a Strangway who fired that shot, and you see my instinct was truer than your reason—and there was a Strangway at our gates—disguised—under a false name—looking at us with smooth, hypocritical smiles—nursing her wrath to keep it warm."

"Unhappily your instinct hit upon the fatal truth. The hatred of the Strangways was not dead. One member of that family survived, and cherished a more than common malignity against the race that had blotted out the old name."

"But my father, how had he provoked her hatred?"

"He once loved her, Juanita—many years ago—before he saw your mother's face. Evelyn Strangway and he had been lovers—pledged to each other by a solemn promise. As a man of honour he should have kept that promise; there were stringent reasons that bound him. But he saw your mother and loved her, and broke with Evelyn Strangway—openly, with no unmanly deceit; but still there was the broken promise, and that involved a deep wrong. He believed that wrong forgiven. He believed the more in her pardon because it was her earnest desire to live unrecognized and unnoticed upon the estate where she was born. He could not fathom the depth of hatred in that warped nature. He did all that there was left to him to do—having taken his own course and entered upon a new and fairer life with the woman he loved—to

make amends to the woman he had deserted. He never suspected the depth of her feelings—he never suspected the seeds of madness, with its ever present dangers. He did what in him lay to atone for the sin of his youth; but that sin found him out, and it was his bitter lot to see his beloved daughter the innocent victim of his wrong-doing. He trusted me to tell you this miserable story, Juanita. He humbles himself in the dust before you, stricken at the thought of your suffering. He appeals through me to your love and to your pity. How am I to answer him when I answer for you?"

She was silent for some moments after he had asked this final question, her eyes fixed, her chest heaving with the stormy beating of her heart.

"What has become of this woman—this pitiless devil?" she gasped.

"She is in a madhouse."

"Is no punishment to overtake her? Is she not to be tried for her life? Let them prove her mad, or let them find her guilty, and hang her—hang her—hang her. Her life for his, her worn-out remnant of wretched, disappointed days for his bright young life, with all its promise and all its hope."

"It would be a poor revenge, Juanita, to take so poor a life. This unhappy woman is under restraint that will, in all probability, last till the day of her death. Her crime is known only to your father and to me. Were it to become known to others she would have to stand in the dock, and then the whole story would have to be told—the story of your father's broken promise—of this woman's youth, bound so closely with his that to many it would seem almost as if they stood side by side at the bar. Do you think that the fierce rapture of revenge could ever atone to you for having brought dishonour upon your father's declining years, Juanita?"

"And my husband's death is to go unavenged?"

"Do you think there is no retribution in the slow agony of a shattered mind—the long blank days of old age in a lunatic asylum, the apathy of a half-extinguished intellect varied by flashes of bitter memory. God help and pity such a criminal, for her punishment must be heavier than hemp and quick-lime."

She seemed scarcely to hear him. She was walking up and down the room, her hands clenched, her brows contracted over the fixed eyes.

"I caught just one glimpse of her as we drove past; but that glimpse ought to have been enough," she said. "I can see her face as we passed the lodge, looking out at us from the parlour window, within a few hours of my darling's death—a pale vindictive face—yes, vindictive. I ought to have understood; I ought to have taken warning, and guarded my beloved one from her murderous hate."

"What am I to say to your father, Juanita? I ought not to leave him long in doubt. Think what it is for a father to humiliate himself before his daughter—to sue for pardon."

"Oh, but he must not do that. I have nothing to forgive. How could he understand that there could be such diabolical malignity in any human breast? How could he think that the wrong done by him would be revenged upon that innocent head? Oh, if she had gone a nearer way to revenge herself—if she had killed me, rather than him. It is such bitterness to know that my love brought him untimely death—that he might have been here now, happy, with long years of honour and content before him if he had chosen any other wife."

"It is hopeless to think of what might have been, Nita. Your husband was happy in your love—and not unhappy in his death. Such a fate is far better than the dull and slow decay which closes many a fortunate life—the inch by inch dissolution of a protracted old age—the gradual extinction of mind and feeling—the apathetic end. You must not talk as if your husband's death was the extremity of misfortune."

"It was—for me. Can I forget what it was to lose him? Oh, there is no use in talking of my loss. I wanted to avenge his death. I have lived for that—and I am cheated of even that poor comfort."

"What shall I say to your father?"

"Say that I will do nothing to injure him—or to distress my mother. I will remember that I am their daughter, as well as Godfrey's widow. Good night, Theodore. You have done your uttermost to help me. We cannot help it, either of us, if Fate was against us."

She gave him her hand, very cold, but with the firm grasp of friendship. The very touch of that hand told him he would never be more to her than a friend. Not so is a woman's hand given when the impassioned heart goes with it.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"A malady
Preys on my heart that medicine cannot reach,
Invisible and cureless."

Mrs. Porter's evanishment created considerable talk in the little village of Cheriton, and would doubtless have been the occasion of still greater wonder but for the impenetrable stupidity of the young maidservant, from whom no detailed account of her mistress's departure could be extorted. Had the girl Phœbe been observant and loquacious she might have stimulated public curiosity by a lively narrative of events; setting forth Theodore Dalbrook's emotion at finding the lodge deserted; and how he had sent up to the house for his Lordship; and how his Lordship and Mr. Dalbrook had remained in earnest conversation for nearly an hour in the lodge parlour; and how Mrs. Porter had left a mahogany box upon the table, a flat mahogany box with brass corners, which Phœbe had never seen before; and how this very box had disappeared mysteriously when the two gentlemen left. All this would have afforded mental pabulum for the acuter wits of the village, and would have formed the nucleus of an interesting scandal, to be uttered with bated breath over the humble tea-tray, and to give zest to the unassuming muffin in the back parlours of small rustic shopkeepers. As it was, thanks to Phœbe's admirable stolidity, all that was known of Mrs. Porter's departure was that she had gone to London by the early train on a certain morning, and that her luggage had been sent after her, address unknown.

It was the general opinion that Mrs. Porter had had money left her, and that she had reassumed her position in life as a genteel personage. This afforded some scope for speculative gossip, but not for a wide range of conjecture, and in less than a month after Mrs. Porter's departure the only talk in relation to the West Lodge was the talk of who would succeed the vanished lady as its occupant. This thrilling question was promptly settled by the removal of the head gardener and his wife from their very commonplace abode in the village to the old English cottage.

Cheriton was furnished with a more interesting topic of discourse before the end of October, when it was "given out" that Lord and

Lady Cheriton were going to winter abroad, an announcement which struck consternation to a village in which the great house was the centre of light and leading, and the chief consumer of butcher's meat, farm produce—over and above the supply from the home-farm—and expensive groceries; not to mention hardware, kitchen crockery, coals, saddlery, forage, and odds and ends of all kinds. To shut up Cheriton Chase for six months was to paralyse trade in Cheriton.

To draw down the blinds and close the shutters of the great house was to spread a gloom over the best society in the neighbourhood, and to curtail the weekly offertory by about one-third.

Everybody admitted, however, that his Lordship had been looking ill of late. He had aged suddenly, "as those fine, well set-up men are apt to do," said Mr. Dolby, the doctor. He looked care-worn and haggard. The village solicitor hoped that he had not been dabbling with foreign loans—or had invested blindly in the fortune of an impossible canal—yet opined that nothing but the Stock Exchange could make such a sudden change for the worse in any man. Mr. Dolby declared that Lord Cheriton's lungs were as sound as a bell, and that if he were ordered abroad it was not on account of his chest.

Everybody pitied her Ladyship, and talked of her as despondingly as if it had been proposed to take her to Botany Bay in the days of transportation for felony. It was so cruel to separate her from her flower-gardens, her hothouses, her poultry-yard, and her daughter; for all which things a correct British matron was supposed to exist. To take her from these placid domestic pleasures, from these strictly lady-like interests, and to plunge her in a hotbed of vice such as Monte Carlo—as pictured by the rustic mind—would be a kind of moral murder. Cheriton recovered its equanimity somewhat upon hearing that his Lordship was going to winter at Mustapha Supérieure—but it was opined that even there baccarat and Parisian morals would be in the ascendant, and a photograph of a square in Algiers, which looked like a bit broken off the Rue de Rivoli, was by no means reassuring.

Yet, whatever Dr. Dolby might say as to the soundness of his lungs, there remained the fact that his Lordship had altered for the worse since the shooting season began. He who used to go out daily with the guns, had this year not gone with them half a dozen times in the whole season. He whose active habits and personal superintendence of his estate had been the admiration of his neighbours had taken to staying at home, dreaming over Horace or Juvenal in the library.

Yes, Lord Cheriton was a broken man. From the hour in which his daughter had laid her head upon his breast, and sobbed out fond words of compassion and forgiveness for the weakness and the sin

that had brought about her one great sorrow—from that hour James Dalbrook's zest of life dwindled, and the things that he had cared for pleased him no more. His heart sickened as he rode his cob by the familiar lanes, and surveyed wide-spreading corn-field and undulating pasture—sickened at the thought of that wretched creature whose dream he had darkened, whose long-cherished hope he had ruthlessly disappointed. The image of Evelyn Darcy, eating out her heart in the dull monotony of a private madhouse, came between him and that sunlit prospect, haunted and tortured him wherever he turned his eye. He had to give up the quiet morning rides which had once been the most restful portion of the day, his thinking hours, his time for leisurely discursive meditations, for indulgence in happy thoughts and humorous reverie.

His wife saw the change in him—knowing nothing of the cause—and urged him to take advice. He gratified her by seeing Sir William Jenner, confessed to being fagged and out of spirits, and obtained just the advice he wanted—complete change of scene—a winter in Egypt or Algiers.

"We'll try Algiers first, and if we don't like it we can try the Nile," he said, and his wife, who would have gone to Vancouver Island or Patagonia just as cheerfully, forthwith ordered her trunks to be packed, and began to take leave of her grandson, an operation which would require weeks.

They left England in the middle of November, just when the last leaves were being stripped from the oaks and beeches by the blustering south-west wind, which is a speciality in that part of the country, where it comes salt with the bitter breath of the sea, and sometimes thick and gray with sea fog.

Mrs. Porter had been nearly three months at Cheshunt Grange, and Theodore had been three times to see her in that carefully-chosen retreat, and on two of those visits had met her daughter Mercy, who went to her twice a week.

He had found Dr. Mainwaring's patient strangely calm and tractable, professing herself contented with her life, and having established her reputation among the other patients as a lady of blameless character and reserved manners.

"I sometimes wonder how they would feel if they knew what I did that night," she said to Theodore once, with a sinister smile. "They think me a common-place person. They call my complaint nervous debility. Nobody here would believe me if I were to tell them that I murdered a man who never offended me by so much as an uncivil word. They don't believe that such a deed as that would be possible in our day, and in our country. They think it was only a couple of centuries ago in Southern Europe that women knew the meaning of revenge."

This was the solitary occasion on which she spoke of her crime.

On the other visits he found her apathetic. Although she was elaborately polite, it was evident that she did not recognize him. She had, however, recognized her daughter, and now received her with some faint show of tenderness, but not without a touch of fretful impatience. It was evident that Mercy's presence gave her no pleasure.

"I go to see her as often as Dr. Mainwaring allows me," Mercy told Theodore, as they walked to the station together. "It is all I can do—and it is very little."

"Have you thought any more of Lord Cheriton's earnest desire to improve your position? Have you learnt to take pity upon him, to think more kindly of him, on account of all he has suffered?"

"I am very sorry for him—but I can never accept any favour at his hands. I can never forget what my mother's life has been like, and who made her what she is."

"And is your own life to be always the same—a monotony of toil?"

"I am used to such a life—but I have some thought of a change in my employment. I had a long talk with your friend Mr. Ramsay last night at Miss Newton's, and through his help I hope to learn to be a sick-nurse. I should be of more use to my fellow-creatures in that capacity than in stitching at fine needlework for rich people's children."

"It would be a hard life, Mercy."

"I am content to live a hard life. I had my span of a soft life—a life of idleness on a summer sea, amidst the loveliest spots upon earth—a life that would have been like a glimpse of Heaven itself, if it had not been for the consciousness of sin and disgrace. Do you think I forget those days on the Mediterranean, or forget that I have to atone for them? The man I loved is dead—all that belonged to that life has vanished like a dream."

They parted at the railway station, she to go to her place in a dusty third-class carriage, he to a smoking carriage to smoke the meditative pipe, and think sadly of those two blighted lives which had been ground beneath the wheels of Lord Cheriton's triumphal car.

Cheriton Chase was deserted, the blinds down, the servants on board wages, the flower-beds empty and raked over for the winter; but at Milbrook Priory all was life and movement. The sisters and their husbands were again established in their favourite rooms. Lady Jane was again at hand to assist her daughter-in-law to bear the burden of a family party, and all was much as it had been in the previous winter, except that Juanita had a new interest in life, and was able to take pleasure in many things that had been an oppression to her spirits last year.

Most of all were her feelings altered towards Mrs. Grenville and her nursery. She was now warmly interested in the history of Johnnie's measles, and deeply sympathetic about that constitutional tendency towards swollen tonsils which was dear little Lucy's "weak point." For must not her Godfrey inevitably face the ordeal of measles, and might not his tonsils show a like weakness at the growing age? All those discussions about nursery dinners—the children who fed well and the children who fed badly—those who liked milk puddings and those who could not be induced to touch them—the advisability of a basin of cornflour or bread-and-milk at bedtime, the murderous influence of buns and pastry, and the lurking dangers of innocent-seeming jam—all these things, to hear of which last year bored her almost to exasperation, were now vital and spirit-moving questions.

The little visitors' nurseries were near the infant Sir Godfrey's rooms, and it was a delight to find the baby taking pleasure in his youthful cousins' society, and revelling in their noise. His own young lungs revealed their power and scope as they had never done before, and led the infant orchestra. Juanita spent hours in this noisy society, sitting on the floor to be crawled over by her son—who was just beginning to discover the possibility of independent locomotion—and to have her hair pulled affectionately by the younger Grenvilles, who found her the most accommodating playfellow. She insisted that the children should dine at the family luncheon table, much to the gratification of their mother and grandmother, and to the exasperation of Mrs. Morningside, who, having left her own children with their conscientious governess and nurses, in the North of England, did not see why her midday meal should be made intolerable by the boisterous egotism of her nephews and nieces.

This was the condition of things at Christmas when Theodore reappeared at the Priory, having come to Dorchester for his holidays, after three months' earnest work. He had been reading with a man of some distinction at the Chancery Bar, and he had been writing for one of the Law Journals. He was struck by the change in his cousin. She looked younger, brighter, and happier than she had ever looked since her husband's death. No one could accuse her of having forgotten him, of having grown indifferent to his memory, for at the least allusion which recalled his image her expression clouded, and her eyes grew sad. But there could be no doubt that the dawn of a happier existence was beginning to disperse the darkness of her night of grief. The influence of her child had done much; the solution of the mystery of her husband's death had done more to relieve her mind of its burden. She was no longer tortured by wonder; her thoughts were no longer forced to travel perpetually along the same groove. She knew the worst, and pity for her father

prompted her to try to forget the wretch who had blighted her young life.

She received Theodore with all her old kindness, with that easy cordiality which was of all indications the most hopeless for the man who loved her. She took him to the nurseries, where Christmas fires blazed merrily, and Christmas gifts strewed the carpet, a plethora of toys, a litter of foil paper and gold and silver fringe, and tissue-paper cocked hats and Pierrot caps, from the wreck of cracker bonbons. The children were masters of the situation in this Christmas week.

"It is *their* season," said Juanita tenderly. "I don't think we can ever do too much to make our children happy at this time, remembering that He who made the season sacred was once a little child."

She took her baby up in her arms as she spoke, and pressed the little face lovingly against her own.

"Why does Mr. Ramsay never come to see me?" she asked with a sudden lightness of tone. "He used to be so fond of baby."

"He is working hard at the hospital."

"And is he not to have any holiday with you?"

"I fear not."

Her manner in making the inquiry, light as it was, told him so much; and he noticed how she bent her face over the child's flaxen head as she talked of Ramsay.

"Why does he work so hard?" she asked, after a silence.

"He has never given me any reason, yet I have my own idea about his motive."

"And what is your idea?"

"Have you ever heard of a man trying to live down a hopeless attachment—trying to medicine a mind diseased with the strong physic of intellectual labour. That is *my* case, Juanita; and I am inclined to think that it may be Ramsay's case too. He has altered curiously within the last few months. I cannot get so near his inner-self as I used to get; but I know him well enough to form a shrewd opinion."

"I am sorry for you both," she said, with a little nervous laugh, still hiding her face against the baby's incipient curls and wrinkled pink skin. "I am sorry you should be so sentimental."

"Sentimental, Nita! Is it sentimental to cherish one love for the best part of a lifetime, knowing that love to be hopeless all the time? If that is your idea of sentimentality, I confess myself sentimental. I have loved you ever since I knew the meaning of the word love—and I have gone on loving you in spite of every discouragement. I loved you when your love was given to another. Yes, I stood aside and harboured not one malevolent thought against the man you had so blest and honoured. I have loved you in your sorrow, as I loved you years ago in your light-hearted girlhood. I

shall love you till I am dust; but I know that my love is hopeless. Your very kindness—in its level uniformity of sweetness—has told me that."

"Dear Theodore, if you knew how I value you—how I admire and respect you—I think you would be content to accept my sisterly regard," she said, looking up at him with tearful eyes. "Perhaps, had we met differently, as strangers, I might have felt differently—but from my earliest remembrance you have been to me as a friend and brother. I cannot teach myself any other love."

"Ah, Nita, that other love comes untaught. You want no teaching to love Cuthbert Ramsay. Don't be angry! I can't help speaking of that which has been in my mind so long. I saw my doom in your face when Cuthbert was here. I saw that he could interest you as I had never interested you. I saw that he brought fresh thoughts and fancies into your life. I saw that he could conquer where I was beaten."

"You have no right to say that."

"I have the right that goes with conviction, Juanita, and with disinterested love. I have the right of my loyal friendship for the man who has shown himself loyal to me. Unless you or I make some sign to prevent him, Cuthbert Ramsay will have made himself an exile from this country before the new year is a month old."

"What do you mean, Theodore?"

"I mean that he is in treaty with the leader of a scientific expedition to the Antarctic Ocean. The ships will be away three years, and if he join that expedition as doctor he will be absent for that time, with the usual hazard of being absent for ever."

"Why is he going?"

"He has never given me any reason, but I suspect that the reason is——you."

"Theodore!"

"If I read his secret right, he left this place deeply in love with you. He knew I loved you, and that was one reason for a man of his generous temper to withdraw. You are rich and he is poor, that makes another reason. He is too honourable to come between his friend and his friend's love. He is too proud to offer himself with only his talents and his unfulfilled ambition to a woman of fortune. So he takes his old mistress Science for his comforter, and is going to the other side of the world to watch the planets in the Polar skies, and to keep the crew free of fever and scurvy, if he can."

"Three years," faltered Juanita. "It would not be so very long anywhere else—but those Polar expeditions so often end in death."

"Shall I tell him not to go?"

"Pray do."

"I'm afraid I shall hardly prevail with him, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you will let me say that you wish him to stay."

She blushed deepest crimson, and again had resource to the baby's pink little head as a hiding-place for her confusion.

"Tell him anything you like. Ask him to come and romp with the children next Easter. He is fond of children, and I am sure he would like my nephews and nieces. Ah, Theodore," she cried, holding out her hand, "now you are indeed my brother. Forget that you ever wished to be more, and let me hear of your having found a new love by-and-by."

"By-and-by is easily said, Juanita."

What would that by-and-by have revealed could the curtain of the Future have been lifted that Christmas Eve, as the children danced in the shadowy room while their elders sat beside the fire in the winter dusk? A coffin brought by land and sea, and laid with stately ceremonial in the cemetery at Dorchester. A respectful obituary notice of Lord Cheriton, with a laudatory biography, setting forth his remarkable gifts and his honourable career: much wonderment among his Lordship's friends at the premature termination of that prosperous life—a man of sixty who had looked ten years younger, and whose vigorous constitution and grand bearing had denoted one of the semi-immortals—a Brougham, a Lyndhurst, or a St. Leonards.

What else? A lovely matron, proud of her handsome Scotch husband and his scientific successes, reigning over one of the most delightful houses in London, a house in which the brightest lights of the intellectual world are to be found shining in a congenial atmosphere. Sir Godfrey Carmichael's widow, now Cuthbert Ramsay's wife, and one of the leaders in all movements that tend towards the welfare and enlightenment of mankind.

What else? A rising barrister, living quietly in a secluded old house at Chiswick, with a sweet serious-looking wife, and two lovely babies, supremely contented with his lot and with his home, which is managed for him with that perfection of art which conceals art. His wife and he are of exactly the same age, have the same deep love of good books, good pictures, and good music, and the same indifference to frivolous pleasures and fashionable amusements. They have a few friends, carefully chosen, and of choicest quality, and amongst the most honoured of these is Sarah Newton, still brisk and active, though her abundant hair is snow white, and there are the deep lines of age about her shrewd and kindly eyes. They have their garden with its old cedars, and old walls shutting off the world of gig-and-villa respectability. They have their boathouse and boats, in which they live for the most part on summer evenings, and they have hardly anything left to wish for—except a lock and weir.

The barrister is Theodore Dalbrook, and his wife's name is Mercy.

He found her four years ago established as nurse at Cheshunt Grange, administering to her mother till the day of her death, which happened by a strange fatality within a few hours of that other death in Algiers, a sudden death by cerebral apoplexy, swift as a thunder-clap. He found her there, and saw her frequently in his duty visits to the Asylum—visits paid in performance of a promise to his unhappy kinsman—and little by little that sympathy which he had felt for her in the first hour of their acquaintance warmed and ripened into love, and in Mercy, the woman who had sinned and paid the bitter penalty of sin, he found the consoling angel of his disappointed youth.

The world knows nothing of her story. That dead past is buried deeper than ever ship went down into the treacherous waters of the tideless sea. To Mercy herself, in her plenitude of domestic bliss, it seems as if it was another woman who shed those bitter tears and drank that cup of shame. The world knows only that Theodore Dalbrook has a lovely and devoted wife, who thoroughly understands and realizes the duties of her position.

Lord Cheriton's will, executed three months before his death at Mustapha Supérieure, bequeathed a life interest in the sum of £20,000 Consols to Sarah Newton, spinster, the principal to go to Mercy Darcy—otherwise Mercy Porter—upon that lady's death.

THE END.

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